

Calif. state Sen. Yee affidavit reads like an action thriller

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[complaint affidavit Senator Yee - Kenith Jackson](#)

An FBI agent carries a box of evidence out of the Ghee Kung Tong temple in San Francisco's Chinatown during a raid Wednesday. Photo: Michael Short, The Chronicle

Coke deals. Shoulder-fired missiles. Hit men. Gang politics. Bribery. Deal-making in dark restaurants, parking lots and [Las Vegas hotel](#) rooms, and on fishing boats off the Hawaiian islands.

A 137-page federal complaint lays out the charges against state Sen. [Leland Yee](#), alleged Chinatown mobster Raymond "Shrimp Boy" Chow and 24 others connected to Chow. But it also reads like a Hollywood script.

There's the slick FBI agent going deeper undercover and pushing the action. There's the gangster with the catchy nickname who publicly claims to have gone straight. And there's the veteran politician, allegedly willing to compromise his values to stay in office.

The tale reached a climax Wednesday when the government unsealed charges against Chow, Yee and 24 others after a series of coordinated raids. Chow, 54, stands accused of money laundering and other crimes, while Yee, 65, faces charges that he traded political favors for campaign donations and, at one point, facilitated a gun-trafficking deal.

The complicated story - plotted in large part by the FBI - started with a meeting in a karaoke bar booth. At the outset, Yee wasn't even on investigators' radar.

Enter 'UCE 4599'

In May 2010, an undercover agent identified only as "UCE 4599" reported sitting down with Chow, the head of the Ghee Kung Tong brotherhood in Chinatown, at a San Francisco karaoke bar.

The agent, who scored an introduction to his prime target through an undercover colleague, portrayed himself as a member of La Cosa Nostra. Over time, the FBI said, he gained Chow's trust - enough to be sworn into his organization as a "consultant."

Chow leaned in, the federal complaint says, to whisper a secret: Although he went clean after his 2003 release from prison, he approved all criminal activity in his organization.

This marked a pattern, authorities said, with Chow refusing to be directly involved in money laundering, gun trafficking and drug running but making introductions to facilitate deals before accepting envelopes stuffed with \$1,000 or \$2,000 in cash from the FBI agent.

In one recorded call, Chow allegedly said he "sacrificed himself by being the target of law enforcement and that has enabled other members of his organization to conduct criminal activity 'freely.' "

The next month, the FBI said, Chow traveled to Oahu to meet with UCE 4599 and another undercover agent. On a chartered boat, the three men purportedly discussed Chow's idea for an illegal scheme to ship "military grade" tungsten metal between the U.S. and China, and to export high-end cognacs.

The schemes didn't pan out. But soon, the FBI said, UCE 4599 provided members of Ghee Kung Tong with millions of dollars he claimed to have earned via drug and gun deals. Chow's associates laundered the money, according to the complaint, and took a 10 percent commission.

The case was moving along like a fairly ordinary gang takedown. But within months of Chow's first meeting with the agent, the FBI said, Chow began working with Keith

Jackson, a former [San Francisco school](#) board member and public relations pro who was doing fundraising work for Yee.

Jackson, 49, approached Chow to seek support for the Hunters Point Shipyard development in the Bayview, a project for which Jackson consulted. According to the complaint, Chow introduced Jackson to the agent in August 2010, telling him that Jackson "can do 'inside deals' with the city."

The following May, the FBI said, Jackson began soliciting donations from the agent for Yee's mayoral campaign, saying he wanted him to give more than the city's \$500 limit - while describing how much money Yee would control if elected mayor.

The agent reported that he refused but set Jackson up with another undercover agent. That agent cut a \$5,000 check to Jackson's consultancy firm that was meant for the campaign and helped raise thousands of dollars more, according to the complaint.

After Yee lost the mayor's race, Jackson allegedly continued to ask the agents for donations. Yee was said to be desperate for money - saddled with \$70,000 in campaign debt and looking for funds for his run for secretary of state.

From the start, according to the complaint, Jackson and Yee agreed that donations would be attached to favors. The scenarios, though, appear to have been fabricated by the FBI.

In exchange for \$10,000, Yee allegedly lobbied a manager at the state [Department of Public Health](#). For \$21,000, the FBI said, the senator agreed to arrange meetings with two senators. And for \$6,800, Yee honored Ghee Kung Tong with an official proclamation.

That same month, the original agent, UCE 4599, reported buying a handgun and ammunition from Jackson and his son, 28-year-old [Brandon Jackson](#). The next month, the agent allegedly bought nine guns and two ballistic vests from the Jacksons. One of the vests had been stolen from the FBI.

The arms dealer

In August 2013, the complaint alleges, conversations between Keith Jackson and the FBI agent broadened.

Jackson allegedly offered to introduce the agent to an international arms dealer whom Yee knew in exchange for more money for the secretary of state campaign.

Jackson, his son and another man also agreed to kill someone for the agent for a fee of \$10,000 to \$25,000, the FBI said. This, too, was a fabrication: Another undercover agent later posed as the supposed victim, and the killing never happened.

At an October meeting, the FBI said, Jackson told the agent that he needed to talk to "Uncle Leland" about brokering a meeting with an arms trafficker who "was attempting

to ship weapons to the Philippines because there was an ongoing war between an unidentified Philippine Muslim group and the Philippine government."

Two months later, the agent reported giving Jackson \$1,000 for Yee's campaign as "motivation" to set up a meeting with the weapons trafficker.

At a meeting soon after, the FBI said, Yee told the agent that he had known the arms dealer for years and that it wasn't a business "for the faint of heart."

"Do I think we can make some money?" Yee asked, according to the complaint. "I think we can make some money. Do I think we can get the goods? I think we can get the goods."

At various times, the FBI said, the agent told Yee he wanted "shoulder-fired weapons or missiles," or "Hellfire missiles," and said he was ready to spend up to \$2.5 million.

The senator allegedly agreed, telling the agent he saw their relationship as beneficial, and promising he could help him in future business deals as secretary of state.

Despondent, paranoid

The complaint portrays Yee, a 26-year public servant who has a wife and four grown children, as despondent with life and paranoid about getting cut out of the arms deal - but also fearful of getting caught.

The senator, the FBI said, alluded to the corruption indictment of another state senator and at one point said he wanted to hide out in the Philippines.

"There is a part of me that wants to be like you," the complaint quotes Yee as telling the undercover agent. "You know how I'm going to be like you? Just be a free agent out there."

At a series of San Francisco meetings this month, the FBI said, Yee met with Keith Jackson and the undercover agent, asking for more campaign money and discussing how weapons from the Philippines would get to buyers in North Africa.

Yee, an outspoken advocate of gun control, purportedly said it would be easier if the agent could get weapons directly from the Philippines, instead of shipping them through New Jersey. Yee allegedly said he had access to automatic weapons - but wasn't sure about shoulder-fired missiles.

Yee told the agent that Africa "was a largely untapped market for trade," the FBI said. But according to the complaint, Yee said he couldn't travel to the Philippines until November, when the election would be over, and that he needed to be there to facilitate the deal.

On Thursday, a day after federal and local authorities stormed his Sunset District home, Yee bowed out of the race for secretary of state.

It's still not clear whether there was ever an international arms dealer - or if Yee, like the agents who took him down, had made the whole thing up.

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