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Fund-Raiser For Pataki Faces Charges

He Is Accused of Tying Contributions to Parole

By WILLIAM K. RASHBAUM

A businessman and political fund-raiser was charged yesterday with promising favorable state parole rulings to the families of three convicted violent felons in exchange for more than \$36,000 in donations to the election campaign of Gov. George E. Pataki.

An indictment unsealed in Federal District Court in Brooklyn charged that one inmate was released as a result of the intervention by the businessman, Yung Soo Yoo, 63, of Glen Ridge, N.J., who raised tens of thousands of dollars for the campaigns of Mr. Pataki and other Republicans.

Mr. Yoo, who was charged with conspiracy and obstruction of justice in connection with those donations, was also accused in the indictment of violating federal campaign finance laws in an unrelated case in which he was said to have solicited \$40,000 from a South Korean yogurt company and illegally funneled \$15,000 of it to the 1998 United States Senate campaign of Alfonse M. D'Amato of New York.

The indictment also charged that \$20,000 was solicited for the 1996 presidential campaign of Bob Dole, but the Republican's campaign did not receive the money because it canceled a planned Korean community fund-raising dinner.

The yogurt maker, identified by a former lawyer for the concern as the Korea Yakult Company, is also said to have paid Mr. Yoo \$100,000 to secure his help in assuring that a former employee held in New York on federal immigration charges and suspected of embezzling millions from the company was deported to South Korea rather than the country of his choice, according to the indictment, which did not charge wrongdoing by the company or its employees.

The indictment contains the most detailed charges in a two-and-a-half-year grand jury investigation into accusations that Pataki campaign officials used the promise of early parole to drum up contributions and exerted their influence with the administration to affect State Division of Parole decisions about Korean-American donors and politically influential Hasidic Jews. The accusations have been embarrassing for Mr. Pataki, who has sought to eliminate parole entirely and has made it tougher for violent felons to win parole release.

Most of the charges in the nine-count indictment tell the story of three Korean families who in 1994 and 1995 were trying to win early release for their sons. Mr. Yoo "told contributors in substance that, in exchange for contributions to the Pataki campaign, their children, who were incarcerated in New York State prisons, would be released from prison," the indictment said.

The indictment described how the families were approached by Mr. Yoo, how they attended Pataki fund-raisers and how they, friends and family members made donations, in one case using Mr. Yoo as a conduit or straw donor to give \$10,000. It also said that in 1994, one family met with a Pataki campaign representative at the campaign's

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Pataki Fund-Raiser Charged With Promising Parole Help

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Manhattan headquarters and personally delivered contributions.

It also detailed how Mr. Yoo was said to have faxed documents about the families' imprisoned children from his New Jersey business, Vitac Optical, to the Pataki campaign, including their inmate identification numbers and the prisons where they were. The documents also indicated that top administration officials contacted the Parole Division on behalf of the inmates.

The investigation has also focused on Patrick Donohue, who was Mr. Pataki's campaign finance director and forwarded Mr. Yoo's requests to administration officials. He has not been charged with any crime. The United States Attorney, Loretta E. Lynch, whose office is prosecuting the case, would not comment.

Margaret Giordano, the prosecutor who has overseen the investigation, said yesterday that no evidence had been uncovered that Mr. Pataki, Mr. D'Amato or Mr. Dole participated in or had knowledge of the crimes.

In fact, Michael F. McKeon, a spokesman for the governor, pointed to that statement as support for the administration's repeated and strenuous denials that officials had engaged in wrongdoing. "This is consistent with what I have said all along, that everything we have done has been right proper," he said.

Douglas M. MacKinnon, a spokesman for Mr. Dole, said that Mr. Yoo had volunteered to raise money for Mr. Dole's campaign and that the dinner cited to in the indictment had been discussed but never scheduled.

Mr. D'Amato, for whom Mr. Yoo had been a longtime and prolific fund-raiser, did not return a telephone call seeking comment.

A lawyer for Mr. Yoo, Nicholas M. De Feis, said his client had committed no crime and called him a patriot and a respected Korean-American businessman. "The indictment is only proof of the adage that no good deed shall go unpunished," the lawyer said, referring to Mr. Yoo's efforts to help the families.

The indictment said that starting in 1994, Mr. Yoo told the families of the three inmates that their sons would be released if they donated money to the Pataki campaign. The three families and their friends made donations totaling more than

\$36,000, and, after Mr. Pataki was elected, Mr. Yoo continued to assure them that their sons would be released, the indictment said. While the indictment identifies the inmates' families as John and Jane Does 1 through 3, the inmates were named in earlier court proceedings as John Kim, Bo Young Chung and James Jhang.

As a result of the intervention of Mr. Yoo and others, John Kim, who had been convicted of three armed robberies in Queens, was released on parole in 1996 after serving the minimum of a four to 12-year sentence, the indictment said. Mr. Kim, who was 21, was released over the objections of the Queens District Attorney's office.

The two other young men, who were not eligible for parole, were not

An embarrassment for one who had sought to end parole.

released. Their families complained to Mr. Yoo and to the Pataki campaign, which returned their contributions in 1996 and 1997. One family also complained to New York City detectives from the Major Case Squad. The detectives, along with United States Postal Inspectors, federal prosecutors and Federal Bureau of Investigation agents in Newark, began the investigation in July 1997.

Earlier this month, Sean McSherry, a former state parole commissioner who was the lead member of the three-member panel that heard the Kim case in April 1996 and unanimously voted to release him, was sentenced to two years in federal prison on perjury and obstruction of justice charges in the case. He was convicted of lying about his role in the release of Mr. Kim, whose father, the Rev. Nam Soo Kim, and friends had given more than \$9,000 to the Pataki campaign.

Another parole official, Ronald Hotaling, pleaded guilty in August to lying to federal officials in the case and told a federal judge at a hearing that he had been told that the governor's office had expressed strong concern about the Kim case.