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Forget Wesley Snipes: This Hollywood Bribes For Tax Breaks Scandal Has It All

Tax troubles can be maddening, expensive, and even frightening. And they can happen to anyone. Sometimes it can seem like well-known figures like Wesley Snipes are unfairly targeted, painted with a brush more appropriate for the advisers that got him into the tax mess. See [To Avoid Fate Of Wesley Snipes, Skip Tax Protester Arguments.](#)



Considering that and all the thousands of innocents often caught in the crossfire of the tax system, you may take particular pleasure in knowing that even a **public tax official** can have tax troubles. Some tax problems are more serious than others. Criminal problems are the most pervasive and worrisome. Even high-powered entertainers like Wesley Snipes have been in the soup—and in jail. See [Wesley Snipes Turns 50 In Prison But Didn't File False Tax Return.](#)

But when the **tax official** responsible for assessing and taxing some of LA's most upscale properties is arrested, get ready for a doosey. The LA County Assessor John Noguez allegedly took bribes for tax breaks. He was charged with 24 felony counts and is alleged to have lowered property tax assessments for hefty bribes. The charges include accepting bribes, perjury, conspiracy and misappropriation by a public officer.

If convicted, he faces up to 30 years in prison. See [LA Tax Assessor Accused of Taking Bribes for Breaks](#). Michael Proctor, Mr. Noguez's attorney, criticized authorities for arresting the assessor before allowing him to present his side. "The charges filed today, as well as the district attorney's public comments, both of which came without even asking for Mr. Noguez's defense or perspective, are very unfortunate," Mr. Proctor said.

Prosecutors claim an Arizona tax consultant, Ramin Salari, gave \$185,000 to Mr. Noguez in 2010 in return for reducing assessments on his clients' homes, businesses and apartment buildings. The payments coincided with Mr. Noguez's campaigning for re-election as assessor. Mr. Salari was arrested and charged with 23 felony counts, including bribing public officials and conspiracy.

Mr. Salari's lawyer, Mark Werksman, said the charges were unfounded. Mark McNeil, another assessor, was also arrested and charged with 14 felony counts. The arrests follow a long-running probe of the LA County Assessor's Office. An internal audit revealed that as many as 157 properties received improper reductions.

Did any of the property owners who got illicit tax reductions know about the alleged bribery scheme? Are any of them being investigated? Stay tuned. And the political campaign aspects of this mess at election time are interesting too.

Earlier this year, Scott Schenter, a former appraiser, was charged with 60 felony counts for allegedly falsifying documents and unlawfully lowering property values in return for contributions to Mr. Noguez's 2010 campaign. Mr. Schenter pleaded not guilty to those charges.

I'll bet someone is negotiating the movie rights.

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