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# Kentucky lawmaker named in vote-buying case declines to comment

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State Rep. John Short, D-Mallie. *Legislative Research Commission*

## Frankfort

State [Rep. John Short](#), whose name surfaced this year in a federal vote-buying investigation in Magoffin County that led to several convictions, said Tuesday that he doesn’t want to discuss the case.

“No comment,” Short, D-Mallie, said as he arrived for a legislative hearing at the Capitol. “After the election, maybe. But no comment right now.”

Short has not been charged with a crime. First elected to the state House in 2010, he faces [Republican John Blanton](#), a retired Kentucky State Police trooper, on Nov. 8. The winner will represent Magoffin and Knott counties and part of Pike County. The race could play a significant role as Democrats fight to preserve their narrow 53-to-47 House majority.

Earlier this month, [a jury convicted two Magoffin County officials](#) for a 2014 vote-fraud scheme: Magistrate Gary “Rooster” Risner and Larry Shepherd, a deputy clerk in the office of his wife, Magoffin County Clerk Renee Arnett Shepherd. The jury also convicted Tami Jo Risner, Risner’s ex-wife.

A fourth defendant, Carty Branch precinct officer Scott Lynn McCarty, [was charged with the others](#) but pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor and cooperated with prosecutors.

During the trial in U.S. District Court in London, [McCarty told the jury about previous Magoffin County elections](#) he allegedly helped rig, buying votes in some instances, manipulating voting machines in others. McCarty testified that he took part in fraud in 2012 to get votes for Short and for Walter Whitaker, an unsuccessful candidate for circuit court clerk.

Additionally, in a statement he provided to the FBI in May, now included in court records, McCarty described meeting with Short shortly before the 2012 election.

“John Short got in my vehicle with me and rode to Gary Risner’s house, discussing with me how he needed me on the election board to help get him elected,” McCarty told the FBI. “We met back up with (Judge-Executive) Charles Hardin and Gary Risner, and as we were leaving, John Short and Charles Hardin insisted that we do ‘whatever it took’ to get Short elected.”

Since Short has refused to explain his involvement with the vote-buying defendants, he needs to resign, said Kentucky Republican Party spokesman Tres Watson. A jury found McCarty to be a credible enough witness to convict three people, Watson added.

“I think the voters of the district deserve an answer,” Watson said. “You don’t go to a restaurant and say ‘I’m hungry’ unless you expect to be fed. And you don’t go to someone known to be a vote-buyer and say ‘I need your help, do whatever it takes’ unless you want votes bought.”

Blanton, Short’s GOP challenger, said people in the 92nd House district have been talking about the vote-buying scandal all summer. However, his campaign will focus on trying to bring jobs to Eastern Kentucky and eliminating drug abuse, not attacking Short, Blanton said.

“I believe in our justice system where you’re innocent until you’re proven guilty,” Blanton said. “I’ll let the FBI continue to investigate this case, and wherever it leads, that’s where it leads.”

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