

FBI raids Treffinger's office

By **BRIAN P. MURPHY**
PoliticsNJ.com

NEWARK, APRIL 18 - The fourth floor offices of Essex County Executive James W. Treffinger at the Hall of Records were raided this morning by FBI agents. Until today, Treffinger was widely perceived is the front-runner for the Republican nomination for U.S. Senator.

At 3:50 PM, more than 7 hours after FBI agents arrived at Treffinger's Newark office, 12 boxes and a personal computer were removed. Federal agents declined to identify the user of the computer, which was removed from Treffinger's suite of offices.

One floor upstairs, federal agents also occupied the offices of Ronald Manzella, the Essex County Administrator. Two agents were seen combing through manila folders of documents but did not specify what they were searching for.

"The FBI, assisted by IRS agents, is conducting an investigation in the Office of the Essex County Executive and the Essex County Administrator," said Special Agent Sandra Carroll of the FBI's Newark office. "I can't characterize the nature of the search at this time"

Carroll declined to confirm if Treffinger was the target of the investigation. She said that no arrests have been made.

A spokesman for U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie refused comment on the raid, and could not detail the nature of the search warrant served at the Hall of Records.

Treffinger also made it clear that he had no intention of abandoning his pursuit of the U.S. Senate seat now held by Robert Torricelli. "At all times, both my administration in Essex County and my campaigns for public office have acted legally and ethically, and I have nothing to hide in either regard," Treffinger said in a statement released shortly after 4:00 PM.

At a press conference held on the steps of the Hall of Records this morning, Essex County Executive candidate Tom Giblin said "it certainly does not bode well for the county leadership. The public has a right to know what's going on and to a speedy adjudication." Calls made to Freeholder President Joseph DiVincenzo, also a candidate for County Executive, were not returned.

None of the other Republican campaigns for U.S. Senate had any comment on this matter. Nor did Senator Torricelli's re-election campaign.

Treffinger out; GOP turns to its bench

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Hoboken, April 22 - In a move that came as no surprise to Republicans throughout the state, Essex County Executive James Treffinger this afternoon withdrew his bid to become the next U.S. Senator from New Jersey after a group of GOP County Chairmen who backed his campaign told him he should get out of the race.

After convening a conference call with eight of the ten county leaders who had endorsed his candidacy, Treffinger explained his desire to remain in the race, but conceded that “his resources should go to defending integrity and clearing the clouds” surrounding his official conduct, said Ocean County Republican Chairman George Gilmore.

“He said he felt he would be vindicated and that, in time, the true facts would come out. But he also recognized that in regard to the campaign, time was working against him,” Gilmore said.

Treffinger asked each of the Chairmen to offer their opinions on the future of his statewide candidacy, according to one Chairman who was on the call. When the group was unanimous in their position that he was no longer a politically viable candidate, Treffinger told them he would exit the race.

While the two-term County Executive did not endorse any of his primary rivals, he did tell the County Chairmen that both Douglas Forrester and State Sen. John Matheussen had conducted themselves honorably. “He left Diane Allen out,” said one Chairman who asked not to be identified. “We got the message.”

While the FBI was raiding Treffinger’s Newark office on Thursday afternoon, operatives from Allen’s campaign placed phone calls to several County Chairmen committed to Treffinger urging them to rescind their endorsements, two of the County Chairmen told PoliticsNJ.com.

During the half-hour call, Treffinger also expressed his belief that he would be vindicated. “It came across clearly that he feels he’s done nothing wrong, which makes it difficult to give up a quest,” Gilmore said.

Indeed, one Republican strategist close to the Treffinger camp said that Treffinger spent much of the weekend seeking a way to sustain his candidacy, but ultimately abandoned it when he realized that “the Republicans in Washington would never send him another dime and \$400,000 wouldn’t be enough to get his message out until November.”

A statement later issued through Treffinger’s Senate campaign later in the afternoon betrayed Treffinger’s frustration with not being able to communicate with the public and press directly concerning the FBI raid and the U.S. Attorney’s investigation.

"So much in some press reports about matters connected with the searches is inaccurate and inflammatory," Treffinger said. "But I am unable to respond to set the record straight, unable to counter innuendo or refute speculations by so-called 'unidentified sources' who can sling mud under the cloak of anonymity."

“Perception takes over,” said Jeffrey Michaels, who served as Chief of Staff during in the administration of former Acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco. “You get engulfed and overwhelmed by perception, and time doesn’t permit the kind of cogent explanation you need as a public official.”

“This is a real shame, given how smart Jim is, and I’m sure he has some explanations,” Michaels continued. “But you can’t get your point across and campaign at the same time.”

“It’s hard to be a defendant and a Senate candidate at the same time,” one County Chairman said.

Republican Co-Senate President John Bennett expressed frustration that nearly a year after DiFrancesco withdrew from his race for governor, another scandal has ended a Republican statewide campaign. “It’s

amazing that a Republican gets investigated and immediately leaves the race, while a Democrat stays in the Senate for 5 years.”

From Washington, Dan Allen of the National Republican Senatorial Committee issued a brief statement: “We think Jim Treffinger made the right decision for himself, his family and his party.” On Friday, the GOP Senate committee's Executive Director had called on Treffinger to get out of the race.

Republican State Chairman Joseph Kyrillos released a statement praising Treffinger’s record as County Executive, and sounded optimistic about the GOP’s chances in November. “New Jersey’s Republican Party has three outstanding candidates, any of whom would make a better United States Senator than Bob Torricelli,” Kyrillos said.

Forrester also had kind words for Treffinger. “I applaud Jim Treffinger for acting in the best interest of the Republican Party,” said in a statement released following Treffinger's withdrawal. “He has been a worthy opponent.”

Torricelli’s campaign manager, Ken Snyder, had no comment on Treffinger’s withdrawal. “The fundamentals of the Senate campaign have not changed,” he said.

But one veteran Democrat told PoliticsNJ.com that the Treffinger debacle would only help Torricelli. “This is the second year where the guy they rallied around blew up. Now they have only second string candidates: two back-benchers in the legislature, one of whom is ideologically out of step with her party, and a former mid-level bureaucrat who used to be in the state pension department.”

Matheussen and Allen, made it clear that their campaigns were continuing at full steam. Allen unveiled a new television advertisement attacking Torricelli, while Matheussen picked up the endorsement of Assemblyman John Rooney of Bergen County, who will serve as his Campaign Co-Chairman. Forrester is expected to receive the endorsement of former Independent Counsel Robert Ray on Tuesday. Ray briefly sought the Senate nomination this year.

Tomorrow, the Republican State Committee will begin working with county committees to remove Treffinger’s name from the June primary ballots. “Our legal counsel will be helping them with petitions to be sent to county clerks,” said Republican State Committee spokesperson Jeanette Hoffman.

Treffinger is also expected to resign as the Essex County Republican Chairman later this week. Two Essex County Republican leaders confirmed that Freeholder James Paganelli, a close Treffinger ally from Verona, is the leading contender to fill the post.