

## DWP Overbilling Case Witness Admits Making Misstatements During Probe; A former employee of Fleishman-Hillard sticks to her basic story that the firm padded its bills.

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A former Fleishman-Hillard employee who testified she padded bills to the city on orders from her former bosses admitted Wednesday to making misstatements to investigators, but held firm to her basic story of fraud by the international public relations firm.

Monique Moret, testifying under a grant of immunity, was pummeled over five hours of cross-examination by a lawyer for John Stodder, on trial in the overbilling scheme that cost taxpayers almost \$6 million.

Also charged in the case is Doug Dowie, the head of Fleishman-Hillard's Los Angeles office. Stodder was his deputy.

All the funds have been repaid by Fleishman-Hillard, which was close to former Mayor James K. Hahn and influential in Los Angeles political circles until the scandal hit.

In the closely watched case cutting to the heart of City Hall corruption, there were more lawyers in court Wednesday than there were jurors.

Stodder's attorney, Jan Handzlik, led Moret through a pile of billing records and account statements to show that some of the overbilling she had described a day earlier on the stand never happened.

The dry evidence left some jurors in the courtroom of U.S. District Judge Gary A. Feess rocking in their padded chairs, stretching their necks and yawning.

Handzlik pushed ahead methodically, crossing up Moret on single bills by pointing to discrepancies between Fleishman-Hillard payroll records and her statements to FBI investigators.

Feess prodded the defense forward, at one point cutting Handzlik off.

"We are not going to plow any more ground that's been plowed four times before. We're not gonna do it," Feess said.

A day earlier, Moret laid out the heart of the case against Stodder and Dowie, testifying she regularly padded monthly

payroll figures submitted to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power in order to produce enough revenue to meet Fleishman-Hillard projections. The office jargon for inflating bills was "ramping up" or "bumping up" the totals in order to "make the number" -- the billing targets she testified she got from Stodder, Moret said.

Dowie, a former journalist and veteran political insider, alleged in a wrongful-termination suit that some staffers were reimbursed through special bonus checks for contributions they made to political candidates. Fleishman-Hillard has flatly denied the allegations, saying Dowie fabricated them in order to extort a financial settlement when he was fired.

At one point, Handzlik asked Moret about her training when she was hired by Fleishman-Hillard.

She said she learned billing from a fellow employee, but added that she received no training "on the ethics of timekeeping."

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California; Metro Desk

John Spano

Times Staff Writer

467 Words

13 April 2006

Los Angeles Times

Home Edition

B-6

English