

Ex-prison warden and his wife indicted

By The Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA -- A former Louisiana prison warden and his wife were indicted Friday on charges that they used a state credit card to make \$152,000 in purchases for themselves, using at least some of the items to build an unauthorized house on prison grounds without seeking bids. Nate Cain and Tonia Cain face one count of conspiracy to commit fraud and 17 counts of fraud in the indictment handed up by a federal grand jury in Alexandria, part of an investigation into misuse of resources in Louisiana's sprawling correctional system. Nate Cain resigned as warden of the Avoyelles Correctional Center in 2016 amid questions about his administration. He's the son of Burl Cain, the longtime warden of the state's largest prison, the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. Burl Cain himself has been accused of misusing state property and labor before he resigned last year. John McLindon, Nate Cain's lawyer declined comment, saying he hadn't read the indictment. Tonia Cain's lawyer did not respond to an email seeking comment. McLindon said he expected an arraignment within 10 days. The indictment says the Cains misused the state credit cards to make the purchases for more than three years, abuse made possible because Tonia Cain was the business manager of the prison until February 2016, helping approve purchases while her husband was the warden. Prosecutors charge that they lied about items being bought for personal use, divided up purchases to stay below the \$5,000 daily limit that required approval by higher-ups, and accompanied other employees with state purchasing cards to stores or gave them shopping lists.

The indictment lists purchases at tire stores in Alexandria and Bunkie, a Tractor Supply in Mansura, Wal-Marts in Alexandria, Pineville and Mansura, a furniture store in Hessmer, a lumberyard in Mansura and an electrical supplier in Alexandria.

Tonia Cain already faces state charges of malfeasance in office, injuring public records and theft in connection with \$31,000 missing from concessions sales.

Louisiana's legislative auditor, in a 2016 report, said Tonia Cain counted the cash alone and ordered employees to shred the records to hide discrepancies between sales amounts and deposits. She's set for trial in September on those charges in Avoyelles Parish.

Tonia Cain's lawyer, Jill Craft, said at the time of the 2016 audit that Cain was "absolutely innocent" of the charges.

Nate Cain was suspended in March 2016 and resigned in May 2016. Craft, who was then Nate Cain's lawyer as well, said Cain quit for health reasons, and he was later approved for a state disability pension, according to The Advocate. However, prison officials said at the time his departure was connected into an investigation into "personnel issues."

Tonia Cain was suspended in April 2016 and retired in May 2016. She has since filed for divorce, The Advocate reports.

Burl Cain has faced similar allegations from legislative auditors, who claim he used nearly \$28,000 to buy appliances and furniture for his house at Angola. Relatives including Nate Cain spent more than 200 nights in state-owned homes at Angola from 2010 to 2015. The auditor said that lodging, plus meals provided, are improper donations of public funds.

Cain is also accused of using prison employees to perform work at his home in Baton Rouge and using the prison's metal fabrication shop to make gates for the house. Cain's lawyer, L.J. Hymel, said at the time of the report that many findings were "in error."