

# Decker admits conspiracy in \$50,000 deal to help Black



The agreement was struck with an unidentified Democrat at a Salisbury IHOP.

BY DAN KANE  
STAFF WRITER

**RALEIGH** - Former state Rep. Michael Decker admitted in federal court Tuesday that three years ago he abandoned the Republican Party and supported Jim Black for a third term as House speaker in exchange for a legislative job for Decker's son and \$50,000.

Prosecutors would not identify the person with whom Decker struck his deal, but much disclosed in federal court Tuesday and in previous State Board of Elections hearings suggests it was Black himself.

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**DEAL:** Who is Decker, and how does this scandal rate in state history? **► 8A**

Decker met the unidentified Democrat at a Salisbury IHOP restaurant, Decker's lawyer, David Freedman of Winston-Salem, said after court. Black and Decker met at the restaurant after the legislative elections in 2002, the Winston-Salem Journal has reported.

Black, now serving his fourth term as speaker, has said that once Decker decided to support him, he raised substantial amounts of campaign money for Decker. And prosecutors said Tuesday that much of the money given Decker for his vote went to his campaign account.

Black has not been charged and has said he has done nothing wrong.

Decker, 61, of Walkertown in Forsyth County, pleaded guilty Tuesday in Raleigh to a conspiracy charge that says he deprived the public of his honest services by engaging in extortion, mail fraud and money laundering. He is to be sentenced Nov. 1 and faces as much as five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Under terms of the plea agree-

Former state Rep. Michael Decker leaves federal court Tuesday in Raleigh after admitting that he took money to change political parties in 2003 in order to keep House Speaker Jim Black, a Democrat, in power. Sentencing is set for Nov. 1.

STAFF PHOTO BY TRAVIS LONG

## Pancake-house deal is a capital mystery



Was Jim Black the man who met Michael Decker at a Salisbury IHOP?

N&O FILE PHOTO

BY ROB CHRISTENSEN  
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STAFF WRITERS

**RALEIGH** - Plenty of clues point to state House Speaker Jim Black as the pancake-house mystery man who gave former Republican Rep. Michael Decker a major infusion of cash in exchange for helping Democrats stay in power.

Decker's plea agreement Tuesday on a corruption charge answered some questions about why a Jesse Helms-style conservative would enrage fellow Republicans

to help Democrats retain control of the state House in 2003. But it also raised one: Who was the unidentified

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**LEGAL?:** Black's lawyers make a case for optometrists' donations. **► 5B**

The plea agreement and the unanswered question sent political tremors through Raleigh. Republicans began considering how to use the corruption issue in the No-

vember elections, and Democrats wondered whether the months of investigations, hearings and indictments involving political fundraising practices would ever end.

A somber Decker declined to talk to reporters as he left the federal courthouse in Raleigh. Black denied he had offered anything in exchange for Decker's vote.

But Decker's lawyer, David Freedman of Winston-Salem, said the \$50,000 deal was made at a

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