

U.S. Attorney General denies Alaska's request to prosecute Bill Allen under Mann Act



Paula Roberds in 2000 at age 16 (left) and at age 26 in 2010. U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch's rejection of Alaska's request to pursue Mann Act charges against Bill Allen is just the latest denial of justice for Paula.

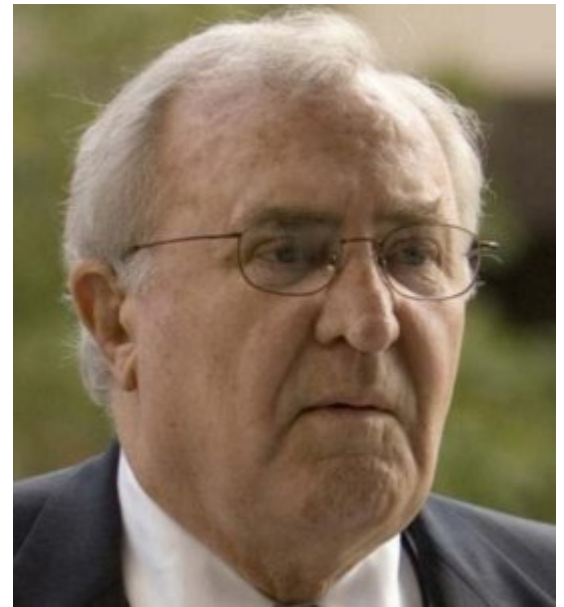
In February of this year, Alaska Senator Dan Sullivan, state Attorney General Craig Richards and John Skidmore of the Alaska Department of Law **held a news conference** (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160415205526/https://unsilencedak.wordpress.com/2016/02/14/1787/>) that gave us new hope in the ongoing struggle to bring sexual predators in the 49th state to justice. The lawmakers first announced a new Public Integrity Unit, designed to give prosecutors better tools to fight corruption in the state—but it was the example used to describe corruption in Alaska that really caught our attention: the numerous scandals surrounding former energy company VECO and its alleged pedosadist former-CEO Bill Allen.

The aftermath of those scandals would see Allen serve time in prison for masterminding an extensive scheme of bribery and corruption. Several prominent Alaskan politicians who accepted VECO bribe money were also convicted of corruption-related charges, due in no small part to Allen's decision to testify on the government's behalf against his former friends and cronies.

Alleged pedosadist Bill Allen

Throughout this period, rumors Bill Allen was hiding darker secrets than extortion and bribery swirled. Defense attorneys for former Speaker of the House Pete Kott tried to use accusations of sexual impropriety as a means to discredit Allen as a witness, but the judge ruled each attempt inadmissible. To this day, Allen has never been charged with any violation of state or federal sex abuse laws, despite ample evidence he paid for sex with multiple underage girls, flying at least one of them from Seattle to Anchorage to do so in direct violation of the federal Mann Act.

Claims the oilman used his wealth and power to exploit teens for sex first came to light in 2004, when 27-year-old Lisa Moore told police she accepted an apartment and gifts from Allen in return for sex when she was 18. She also introduced him to a girl named Bambi Tyree, then 15, a prostituted child and crack addict who would soon fall prey to Allen's craven desire for underage girls. By 2004, Bambi was in serious trouble, on the run from police after being charged in connection with a massive drug and human trafficking bust involving another prominent Anchorage businessman, former Alaska Industrial Hardware president **Josef Boehm** (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160415205526/https://unsilencedak.wordpress.com/2016/02/26/josef-boehm/>). According to *Alaska Dispatch News* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160415205526/http://www.adn.com/article/full-disclosure>), Tyree sought help from Allen while a fugitive—and while Allen refused to offer any assistance, he didn't tell police about the visit.



Moore's information led Anchorage Police Department Detective Kevin Vandegriff to open an investigation into Allen's alleged sex crimes, but federal investigators soon demanded the investigation be suspended. "In March 2004, I was advised by Assistant U.S. Attorney Frank Russo to not actively investigate this case," Vandegriff wrote in Allen's case file. Asked for a more detailed explanation for the reasoning behind this seeming obstruction of justice, the FBI's initial response was to deny the request ever happened. Later, under pressure from reporters, the agency amended its answer in a statement which claimed "they wanted to focus on the larger sex-ring investigation" while adding they felt "the allegations against Allen were difficult to prove."

In late 2007, Detective Vandegriff reopened the APD's investigation into Bill Allen. Captain Gardner Cobb, then the city's chief of detectives, declined to reveal any specifics on what prompted the action, but reports at the time speculate it may have been due to a combination of civil suits filed by Josef Boehm's teenage victims and the growing corruption scandal involving VECO. The new investigation got off to a rough start, with Cobb admitting to reporters that witnesses whom the APD "hoped would resolve the matter couldn't be found." And while Cobb again refused to provide any further detail, it's known that Bambi Tyree was refusing to cooperate with detectives. By August 2008, however, Vandegriff's witness woes seemed to be over thanks to a new witness named Paula Roberds.

Paula Roberds grew up in Goodnews Bay, a small Yup'ik village near Bethel, raised by a single mother with whom she had a strained relationship. She left home at 15, moving in with a violent man who possessed a hefty criminal record which included charges of kidnapping, assault and numerous domestic violence arrests. Even more horrifying, Williams had also been implicated in the gang rape of a 16-year-old girl. Although Paula has described Williams, 15 years her senior, as her "boyfriend," he in fact became Paula's pimp, sending her out into one of the city's toughest and most dangerous areas, forcing the teen to work the same streets where serial killers like Robert Hansen, Joshua Wade and Israel Keyes stalked,

streets where dozens of sex workers have been raped, murdered—or simply vanished without a trace.

On one such night, as Paula worked a section of Spenard Road, a white Land Rover pulled up and asked her if she'd like a ride. The driver was Bill Allen. According to Paula, he asked her if she was a cop, to which she replied "Don't I look too young to be a cop?" She says he then asked her how old she was; she told him she was 15. Allen's alleged response to learning the girl he intended to use as a receptacle for his repulsive lusts was only a child? He asked her to show him her breasts, and the young girl obliged.

Paula told investigators how Allen drove her to a warehouse on Arctic Spur Road and led her into a small camper parked inside and had sex with her. The encounter was the first of nearly 10 she says she and Allen had over the next few months, either in the camper or at Allen's home. During this time he seems to have developed a sick fixation on the girl, getting upset when she told him of Williams' decision to move them both to Seattle. She says Allen flew to Seattle to see her once, buying her expensive clothes and a \$1,000 watch. After that, Roberds says Allen flew her back to Anchorage for sex multiple times, putting her up in a suite in the Downtown Hilton and giving her money. And while Paula was now 16, the legal age of consent in Alaska, each flight from Washington to Alaska was a violation of the Mann Act, a federal law which makes bringing someone across state lines for the purpose of prostitution a felony, with greater penalties when the victim is under 18.

Sometime around 2002, when Paula was 17, Roderick Williams was arrested and jailed in Seattle for beating another woman, and she moved back to Anchorage. Allen continued contacting her for sex, but seemed to think there was more to it than his using his wealth and power to buy an impoverished young teen's body. "He asked me, 'Do we have a relationship going on, or is this all about the money?'" Paula told *Alaska Dispatch News* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160415205526/http://www.adn.com/article/20100820/federal-officials-wont-prosecute-bill-allen-sex-charges-aug-22-2010>). "I told him it was all about the money, and he got pretty upset about it." She says she still saw him for a time, but he "acted different."



Roderick Williams

Becoming the main witness in such a high profile case couldn't have been easy for Paula. Every word and detail of her story was subjected to intense scrutiny through a series of interviews with APD detectives, FBI agents and prosecutors. By all accounts from those who conducted those sessions, Paula was an excellent witness, providing law enforcement with graphic descriptions of Allen's anatomy, sketches of the hotel rooms where they met and detailed accounts of each time Allen used her for sex.

According to *Alaska Dispatch News* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160415205526/http://www.adn.com/article/20100820/federal-officials-wont-prosecute-bill-allen-sex-charges-aug-22-2010>), Detectives Kevin Vandegriff and Michelle Logan used Paula's information to obtain search warrants which resulted in the collection of "corroborating evidence in airline and other business records." Such evidence included 3 round-trip tickets between Seattle and Anchorage charged to Allen's American Express, as well as almost perfect matches between Paula's sketches and the actual rooms. In addition, the detectives interviewed about two dozen witnesses, "including two women who participated in 'threesomes' with [Roberds] and Allen for cash." Roberds' mother was also able to confirm the flights between Seattle and Anchorage, telling officers she had seen Allen picking up and dropping off her daughter.

Vandegriff and Logan were confident about taking the case and their witness before a Grand Jury, as were Barak Cohen, a federal trial prosecutor with the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section of the Justice Department who had worked with the APD on the case for two years, and CEOS section chief Drew Oosterbaan. All four felt sure the evidence was more than sufficient to indict Allen on Mann Act charges. But in August 2010, the two federal prosecutors were told by their superiors in Washington, D.C. that the Department of Justice would no longer pursue the case. In an instant, the investigation had been shut down by federal officials for the second time.

“We were ready to go the grand jury in March, April 2009,” said Detective Michele Logan, bitterly disappointed at a situation which seemed unthinkable given a case she and Vandegriff both agreed was strong. “The evidence is there.” As an added insult, the frustrated detectives would receive no explanation for the the DOJ’s actions, because department policy forbade all outside discussion of the internal decision making process. Paula Roberds, who bravely came forward to tell her story without a shield of anonymity, called the decision “devastating.” Her courageous stand against Bill Allen’s perverse sense of entitlement had been answered with indifference and silence, all to protect a man already known to be one of the most corrupt in Alaskan history.

Because the Mann Act is a federal law, the Justice Department’s refusal to pursue the case meant local investigators like Vandegriff and Logan were left powerless to bring Bill Allen to justice. The only recourse for the state of Alaska was to petition the federal government for “cross designation,” a process by which the U.S. Attorney General effectively deputizes state officials, granting them the authority to prosecute violations of the Mann Act outside of the federal court system. The text of the law is clear: Such requests may only be denied in cases where cross designation would “undermine the administration of justice.”

But laws are only as good as the ways in which they are interpreted, as Craig Richards, Alaska’s Attorney General soon found out. On two separate occasions, Richards sent cross designation request to the Justice Department—and both were rejected by then-U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder. And just as they had done in 2010, these new refusals were issued with no details to explain the reasoning behind the federal government’s decision. Rumors that federal officials had promised Bill Allen immunity from prosecution in exchange for his testimony in the 2008 bribery trial of Senator Ted Stevens grew from speculation to pointed questioning—and then to outright accusations the Justice Department was protecting a man who preyed on children.

By 2012, continued federal stonewalling led Senator Lisa Murkowski to **formally request an investigation** (https://web.archive.org/web/20160415205526/http://www.murkowski.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=PressReleases&ContentRecord_id=194d8589-9311-4928-b71e-4c416f509dc9&ContentType_id=b94acc28-404a-4fc6-b143-a9e15bf92da4&Group_id=c01df158-d935-4d7a-895d-f694ddf41624&MonthDisplay=11&YearDisplay=2011). “I would like to believe that Department of Justice personnel followed applicable laws and departmental policies,” she wrote in a letter to Holder, before making it clear she did not think they had. Mistrust of the federal government by Alaskan officials was at an all time high, prompting Murkowski to demand an “objective, thorough and independent investigation.” After all, the state was still reeling from the confused muddle of the Stevens case, in which one of the most powerful senators in history had been convicted of corruption, only to have the conviction overturned after it was revealed prosecutors mishandled and withheld evidence which may have exonerated the Senator. It not only seemed possible to Alaskans the government would protect their star witness, it seemed likely—even after the revelation that Allen had most likely perjured himself on the stand.

Senator Murkowski’s letter was the start of a campaign of pressure which would continue for over a year. In the end, **the response** (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160415205526/http:>

[//www.murkowski.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/a243ec6a-f63d-4621-a546-c900c052ab84/12.01.13.doj.response.pdf](http://www.murkowski.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/a243ec6a-f63d-4621-a546-c900c052ab84/12.01.13.doj.response.pdf)) from the Justice Department's Office of Professional Responsibility was dismissive, refusing the Senator's demand for an investigation. Officials involved with each rejection of Alaska's right to pursue justice were "vested with wide discretion in deciding whether to pursue criminal charges," the OPR's report said, and in their estimation, everything had worked exactly as it should, with no evidence that the Justice Department's refusal was "based upon improper considerations." This was not the objective, independent investigation Lisa Murkowski requested, this was a bureaucracy absolving itself of any wrongdoing with a hand wave. And with that, the matter seemed to stall once again.

It would be another Senator, Dan Sullivan, who next threw his shoulder against the seemingly immobile gears of justice. Sullivan, who had been Alaska's Attorney General in 2010, defeated former Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich's Senate reelection bid in 2014. And one of the pieces of legislation Alaska's new Senator pushed through into law was an amendment to the Mann Act requiring any rejection of a state's cross designation request be accompanied by a detailed explanation as to why. This was the reason for the big press conference: Alaska was going after Bill Allen again with a hope that Attorney General Loretta Lynch, who had not been involved in the previous decisions, would be more sympathetic. That hope would be in vain.

On Tuesday, April 5, 2016, United States Attorney General Loretta Lynch **denied Alaska's third cross designation request** (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160415205526/http://www.adn.com/article/20160405/bill-allen-cant-be-prosecuted-state-us-justice-dept-says>), and it became clear the Justice Department's idea of a "detailed explanation" differed greatly from that of many Alaskans. Lynch did address, and then deny, accusations the federal government had given Allen immunity from prosecution, saying instead the case against him simply wasn't strong enough. We can only imagine what Detectives Vandegriff and Logan, both veteran evidence gatherers, might think about that.



Stonewalling by the Department of Justice in the Bill Allen case led Alaska Senator Dan Sullivan (left) to spearhead a change in federal law. U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch (right) became the latest federal official to reject Alaska's request to pursue Mann Act charges against Allen.

Once again, the citizens of Alaska were denied their chance to punish a man who had harmed one of their own, denied it with a limp, toneless explanation written by officials thousands of miles away. Even more

insulting is the fact a change in federal law was required to get even that pittance of a response. This wasn't lost on Sullivan, who said, "I find it incredibly frustrating that it took the threat of violating a new federal law for the Department of Justice to finally and directly answer a question that Alaskans have been asking for years."

The Justice Department's bland response to a case which involves the exploitation and rape of young girls smacks of the sort of careless dismissal we've come to expect from government bureaucrats. Instead of a thorough review of the facts, Alaska was given boilerplate pap wrapped in a flaccid defense. Lynch simply referenced the two previous rejections issued by her predecessor Eric Holder and treated them as holy writ. "The department has already determined [the allegations against Allen] did not meet the Principles of Federal Prosecution." Such a statement speaks more to Lynch's spineless unwillingness to break precedent than any real dedication to jurisprudence.

"What is the potential downside of letting the state of Alaska apply its resources to see if it can put a case together?" Craig Richards asked in a report by *Alaska Dispatch News* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160415205526/http://www.adn.com/article/20160405/bill-allen-cant-be-prosecuted-state-us-justice-dept-says>). "It's a disappointment we were denied that chance." But of all the people disappointed with the decision, there can be no one our hearts go out to more than Paula Roberds.

"Guys with money, they can do anything," Paula Roberds is **said to have told** (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160415205526/http://www.adn.com/article/20160405/bill-allen-cant-be-prosecuted-state-us-justice-dept-says>) Detective Vandegriff in their first interview in 2008, and the United States Department of Justice has proven her right time and time again. Bill Allen bribed, extorted, coerced, exploited and raped his way across Alaska for decades, and for this host of crimes he served 36 months in a minimum security prison, after which he retired to New Mexico with his millions.

The people of Alaska are not demanding an automatic guilty plea, we are merely asking our government to do its duty in protecting its citizens by allowing evidence of a crime to be presented at trial. Equal treatment under the law is a cornerstone of our society, and when justice is denied by the very men and women who have sworn to uphold it, the only result can be emboldened predators and lives spent in fear from their attacks.

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