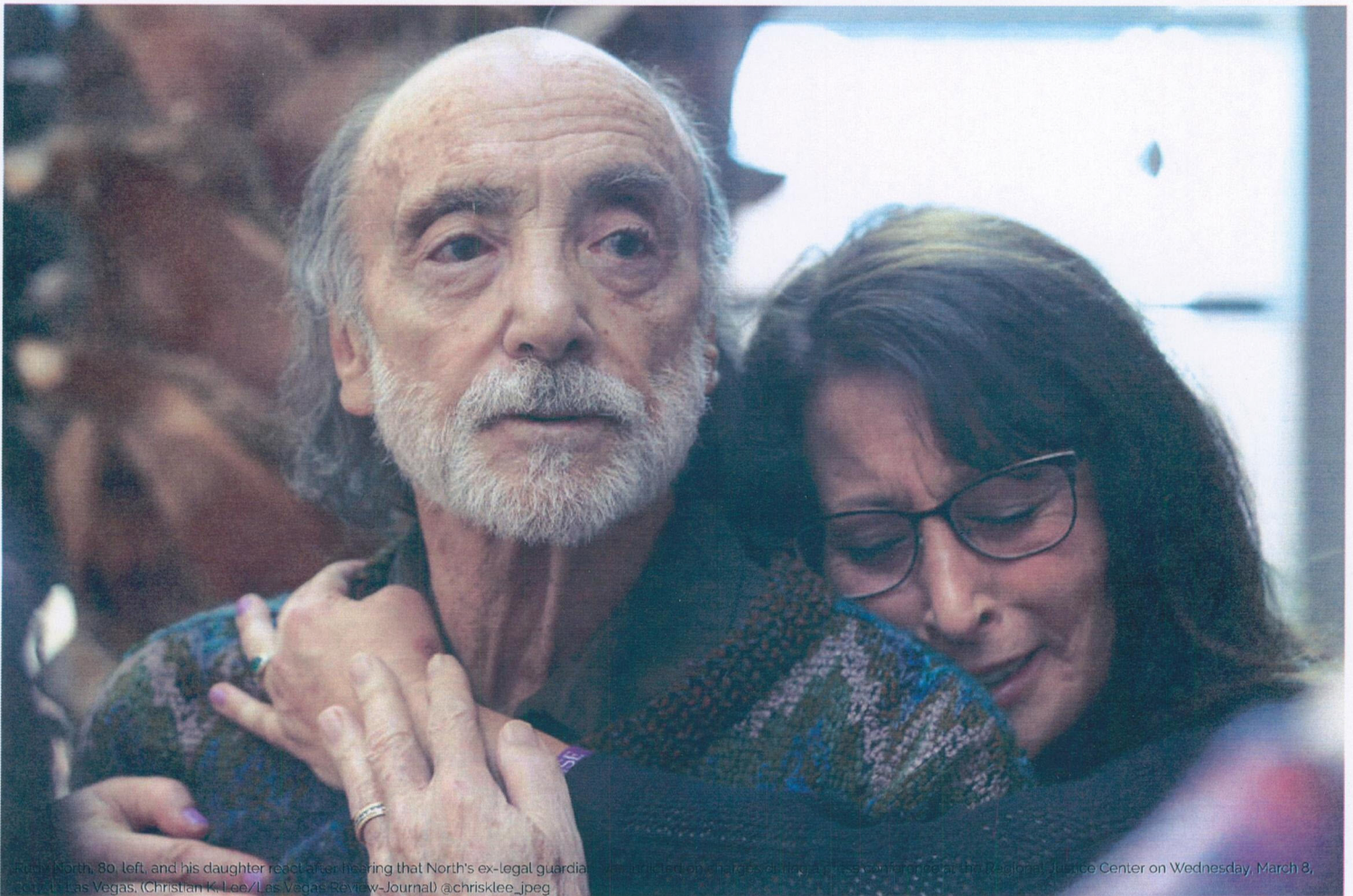


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Grand jury indicts Nevada guardian on more than 200 charges



Randy North, 80, left, and his daughter react after hearing that North's ex-legal guardian was indicted on more than 200 charges in front of the Regional Justice Center on Wednesday, March 8, 2017 in Las Vegas. (Christian K. Lee/Las Vegas Review-Journal) @chrisklee.jpeg

By COLTON LOCHHEAD LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL
March 8, 2017 - 12:19 pm



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Updated March

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But Clark County District Attorney Steve Wolfson made it clear in a press conference that Parks "was the No. 1 target in this investigation."

The 123-page indictment, which laid out the 212 felony charges levied against Parks, claimed she used her position and her company, A Private Professional Guardian, LLC, "to steal funds belonging to elderly and disabled persons over whom they had guardianship authority."

The indictment said that Parks used fraudulent billing practices, and that Parks and Simmons organized and directed a "criminal syndicate" while stealing roughly \$559,000 from 150 victims between 2011 and 2016. Most of those victims, Wolfson said, are no longer alive.

Simmons faces 134 felonies similar to the charges levied against Parks. Taylor faces seven charges, and Simpson was charged with one count each of theft and filing a false document.

Judge Jennifer Togliatti issued a no-bail arrest warrant for Parks and Simmons and set the bail at \$200,000 for Taylor, Palmer, who appeared at the hearing, agreed to pay \$7,500 for bail and to return to court March 22.

Parks was one of the most active private professional guardians in Southern Nevada. She often acted as the surrogate decision maker for 50 to 100 elderly and mentally incapacitated people, called wards, at a given time. As the guardian, Parks had full control of the wards' finances, estates and even medical decisions.

Last year, Parks left Nevada, leaving dozens of wards behind and forcing the already-overburdened Clark County public guardian's office to step in to care for them. Guardianship Judge Cynthia Dianne Steele issued a separate bench warrant for Parks' arrest last summer after Parks failed twice to appear in court for one of the cases she abandoned. Attorneys claimed Parks grossly overbilled her wards, and they called for a law enforcement investigation of her practices.

One of Parks' former wards, Rudy North, said he never expected these charges to come.

North, 80, and his wife, Rennie, spent two years under Parks' guardianship.

The indictment claims Parks stole \$1,300 from the couple through overbilling, but North said the impact was much larger and went beyond finances.

North said the couple was taken from their home and put into an assisted living facility in Boulder City. Parks sold nearly all their possessions shortly after moving the couple. North claimed,

He compared being taken away from their home and family to his experience living in Auschwitz, the World War II Nazi concentration camp for Jews.

"We were taken without announcement, without the ability to make a phone call," North said. "The only thing we beat them on, really, is we're alive today."

The indictment and arrests mark a newfound focus from law enforcement at the state and local levels to protect the elderly and mentally incapacitated from fraud and abuse by those who are supposed to care for them.

In the past, law enforcement rarely investigated guardianship abuses, because they were seen as either a court or civil issue. But a new 10-person unit inside the attorney general's office and a joint task force between that office and local agencies have given law enforcement the needed teeth to dig into the abuses committed because of those failures.

"There are failures in our community in how we've dealt with this issue," Wolfson said.

At the court level, an overburdened system and a lack of oversight left these wards vulnerable to exploitation. A Las Vegas Review-Journal series published in April 2015 detailed those shortfalls. (<https://www.reviewjournal.com/news/las-vegas/clark-county-s-private-guardians-may-protect-or-just-steal-and-abuse>)

In response to the series, the Nevada Supreme Court formed a commission of lawmakers, lawyers and advocates with the goal of fixing those problems.

The panel last fall made several recommendations, including ensuring every ward has the right to an attorney and adding significant oversight and accountability to the guardianship process.

The investigation was a joint effort of Metro and the attorney general's and district attorney's offices. Wolfson said other cases of guardianship abuse are pending, but he did not detail those cases or give a timeline for when charges could come.

Parks is expected to be extradited to Las Vegas for the trial.

Contact Colton Lochhead at clochhead@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-4638. Follow @ColtonLochhead (<https://twitter.com/coltonlochhead>) on Twitter.

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April Parks's 212 felony charges:

1 count of racketeering

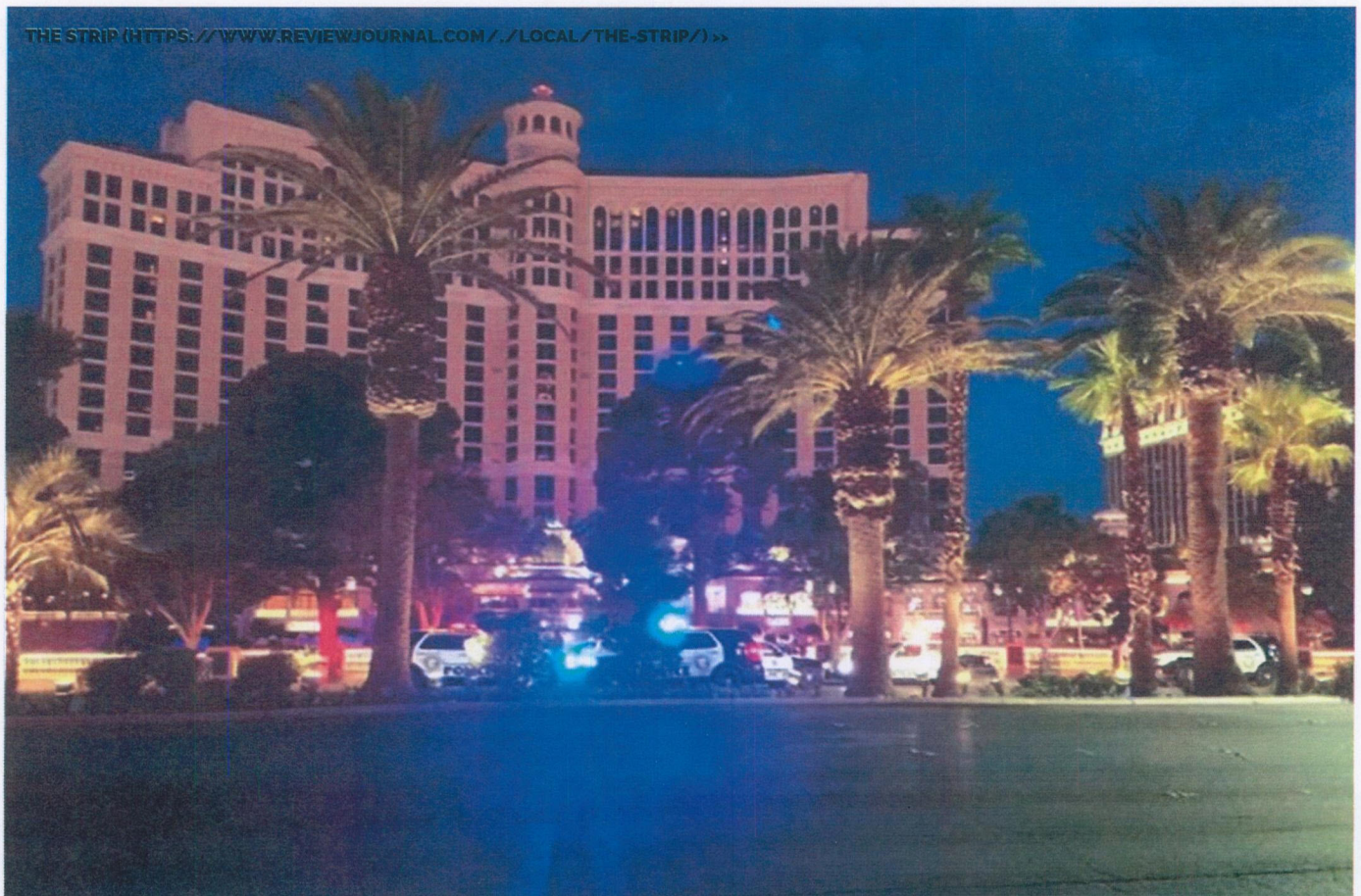
42 counts of theft

37 counts of exploitation of an older person or vulnerable person

74 counts offering a false instrument for filing of record

58 counts of perjury.

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