

7 in NY charged in Craigslist prostitution ring

May 20 2009, By MARCUS FRANKLIN , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Seven people have been indicted on charges of running a 24-hour prostitution ring on Craigslist, New York's attorney general announced Wednesday, the day after Craigslist's CEO filed a lawsuit to keep South Carolina's attorney general from pursuing criminal charges against the company.

Five of the seven New York residents were arrested Wednesday on charges of [corruption](#), conspiracy and money laundering. They're scheduled to appear in state [Supreme Court](#) on Wednesday in Queens, where authorities say the operation was based.

Authorities are searching for the two others.

Late Tuesday night, [Craigslist](#) chief executive Jim Buckmaster sued South Carolina's attorney general, saying the prosecutor's threat to file prostitution charges against the San Francisco company violates its executives' constitutional rights.

The complaint filed in federal court in South Carolina seeks a restraining order to prevent Attorney General Henry McMaster from filing any such charges and contends that McMaster's warnings violate the U.S. Commerce Clause.

Last year, McMaster and attorneys general from dozens of other states entered into an agreement with Craigslist to improve the site's safeguards. But McMaster says he doesn't think Craigslist has done

enough to keep ads for prostitution off the Web site.

Earlier this month, McMaster called on Buckmaster to take down ads related to prostitution and pornography, giving Craigslist 10 days to comply or face possible charges. When that deadline passed, McMaster said he would prosecute Craigslist executives for aiding and abetting prostitution if an ad on the Web site leads to a prostitution case in South Carolina.

Craigslist announced plans last week to eliminate its "erotic services" category and screen all submissions to a new "adult services" section before they are posted.

"Misuse of Craigslist in connection with illicit activity is unacceptable, and we work closely with law enforcement to address it," Buckmaster said in a statement. He said Craigslist will cooperate with New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo's investigation.

The group named in the 47-count indictment unsealed Wednesday in New York is accused of operating Room Service Entertainment in the "erotic services" section on Craigslist from June 2007 through December 2008. Investigators say the ads included explicit or seminude photographs and a phone number to arrange "dates."

The defendants each face a maximum 25 years in prison if convicted.

They are Scott "Sal" Rosenberg, 45; Patricia "Nikki" Krupa, 32; Josef Davenport, 31; Joanna "Anna" Mercado, 24; Sylvia "Jamie" Soto, 29; Lina "Tina" Vazquez; and Barbara "Lisa" Morris, 48. Attorney information for them wasn't immediately available. Rosenberg and Davenport are accused of being the operations co-owners; the others are accused of being bookers.

"Until Craigslist gets serious about putting real protections in place," Cuomo said in a statement, "it will continue to be an environment where criminal operations thrive with impunity."

Associated Press Writer Meg Kinnard in Columbia, S.C., contributed to this report.

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