



CHARGES AGAINST 323 ARE DROPPED - MASS ARRESTS AT BRIDGES DIFFICULT FOR PROSECUTORS

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The St. Paul city attorney's office said Friday it will not prosecute 323 people arrested Sept. 4 on the Marion and Cedar street bridges who were there as part of the Republican National Convention protests.

The individuals were cited on suspicion of unlawful assembly or presence at an unlawful assembly. They total about 82 percent of the 396 people rounded up during those protests.

Prosecutors will continue to investigate another 20 cases from that date, said City Attorney John Choi. Possible charges in those cases include false information to police, fleeing on foot, obstructing legal process and disorderly conduct.

"When we decide to proceed on a case, it is because we believe we can succeed at trial," Choi said at a news conference. "If we come to the conclusion that we can't prove this beyond a reasonable doubt ... we have to dismiss this case. Ultimately, it's the right thing to do in terms of our role as prosecutors."

Choi emphasized that the decision does not mean police acted improperly on the street.

"The professional obligations and situations that are in front of a prosecutor and a police officer are very, very different," Choi said.

One problem presented by the cases: There were mass arrests and people tried to conceal their identities, Choi said. That makes it harder to convince a jury that one specific person accomplished one particular crime.

Many people who were arrested complained they had been going in the direction police told them to go when they were detained on the last day of the GOP convention.

Ted Dooley, an attorney who has represented several activists, said Choi was acting "honorably."

"They're not good cases," Dooley said. "You can't just go around sweeping up 800 people and saying, 'Criminal, criminal.' It actually antagonizes people."

The Ramsey County attorney's office, which prosecutes more serious crimes, reported Friday that it reviewed 75 cases involving individual adults and charged 22 of them. Two have pleaded guilty, three have been dismissed and 17 are pending -- including those of the so-called "RNC 8," a Twin Cities group charged with terrorist activities in advance of the convention.

Another 100 or more cases involving large groups of suspects were reviewed in batches and declined for prosecution, a spokesman said.

Fifty-one juvenile cases also were reviewed; 12 of those were charged.

As of Friday, the city attorney's office said it had reviewed 672 cases for prosecution. Those included more serious cases from the earlier days of the four-day convention, which began Sept. 1 in St. Paul.

Of those 672:

- 442 cases have been declined or dismissed by the city attorney's office or, in the case of seven people, by the court. Those include the 323 cases disposed of Friday.
- 52 cases have been resolved by a guilty plea or payment of a fine.
- Another 52 cases are either active in the court system or have pending arrest warrants.
- 48 cases have been dismissed for miscellaneous reasons, including cases against 39 journalists.
- 67 cases are still under investigation.

About 100 additional people were arrested Sept. 3 in Minneapolis after a Rage Against the Machine concert.

The St. Paul city attorney's office said the case against Leah Lane remains under investigation. Lane was the 19-year-old Eau Claire, Wis., activist arrested after she made a peace sign to police officers and sang "All You Need Is Love" before she was pepper-sprayed.

Peter Panos, a spokesman for St. Paul police, said the department is satisfied with the city attorney's decision.

"We made sure that the RNC went smooth, that we had minimal damage to property, and we had very few people injured at all. Our part is over once we make an arrest and write a report," Panos said. "We don't get frustrated with that."

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