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Big Dig contractor, manager plead guilty to fraud

BOSTON (AP) — A Big Dig contractor and one of its managers pleaded guilty Friday to fraud on accusations of overbilling the project by \$300,000.

McCourt Construction Co. and Ryan McCourt, who handled billing for the company, admitted to charges including defrauding the massive construction project by falsely categorizing apprentice ironworkers as higher-paid journeymen, which inflated the bill for their work.

With the plea, McCourt Construction agreed to a \$500,000 fine. Ryan McCourt, the son of owner Richard McCourt, could face five years in prison, but the U.S. attorney's office said it would recommend a shorter sentence.

McCourt Construction had a \$245 million contract to do finish work on the Interstate 93 tunnel. The U.S. attorney's office says the scheme involved more than 1,500 instances of overbilling and took place over three years, starting in 2002.

In a statement, McCourt Construction and Ryan McCourt said the problem was isolated and "not consistent with McCourt Construction's overall commitment to integrity and a long-standing history of impeccable business practices."

The \$14.79 billion Big Dig, famous for delays and cost overruns, buried the old elevated Central Artery and improved connections to highways and Logan International Airport.

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