

U.S. Virgin Islands Officials Found Guilty in \$1.4 Million Bribery and Kickback Scheme

On February 27, 2008, following a 2-week trial, a Federal jury in St. Thomas found Dean C. Plaskett, former Commissioner of the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR), guilty of demanding and accepting bribes and obstructing justice. The same jury also found Marc A. Biggs, former Commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement, guilty of demanding and accepting bribes in a \$1.4 million bribery and kickback scheme. Sentencing has been scheduled for July 2, 2008.

In November 2007, Plaskett and Biggs were charged with demanding and accepting a series of bribes and kickbacks in exchange for awarding approximately \$1.4 million in government contracts and then authorizing more than \$1 million in payments on these contracts, despite little or no work having been performed. Plaskett and Biggs were also charged with obstructing justice, stemming from attempts to thwart the criminal investigation into the underlying bribery and kickback scheme.

Plaskett and Biggs were found guilty of demanding and accepting bribes and kickbacks associated with a \$650,000 contract awarded to a "shell" company created by others involved in this elaborate scheme. Plaskett was also found guilty of obstructing justice for attempting to have documents created and backdated to falsely document work never done by the shell company.

To date, four individuals, including three other former U.S. Virgin Islands government officials, have pleaded guilty to felony charges as a result of this investigation. Former DPNR Director of the Division of Environmental Protection Hollis L. Griffin, former Virgin Islands Fire Services employee Earl E. Brewley, and businessman Esmond J. Modeste of Atlanta, Georgia, have pleaded guilty to violating the Federal bribery statute, honest services mail fraud, and structuring currency transactions in furtherance of the underlying bribery and kickback scheme. The three defendants have been sentenced to prison – Griffin for 4 years, Modeste for 30 months, and Brewley for 21 months – and ordered to pay restitution in the approximate amount of \$1.1 million. In addition, former DPNR Director of Permits Brent E. Blyden pleaded guilty to conspiring to obstruct the criminal investigation into the bribery and kickback scheme. Blyden is currently awaiting sentencing.

In early 2000, with Blyden's assistance, Griffin, Brewley, Modeste, and others formed a sham business by the name of Elite Technical Services (Elite) and used the entity, as well as other companies, to seek and be awarded at least seven government contracts valued at approximately \$1.4 million. The contracts were authorized and awarded by Plaskett, Biggs, Griffin, and Blyden. Although little or no work was completed, payments totaling more than \$1 million were authorized by Plaskett, Biggs, Griffin, and Blyden, and paid to Elite and the other complicit companies. After the contract proceeds were negotiated, Modeste, Brewley, and others kept a portion of the illicit proceeds for themselves and paid cash bribes and kickbacks totaling between \$300,000 and \$350,000 to government officials, including Plaskett, Biggs, Griffin, and Blyden.

This investigation is being conducted jointly with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the U.S. Virgin Islands Inspector General. (Case Cost: \$228,072)