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TWO VIRGIN ISLANDS COMMISSIONERS SENTENCED IN \$1.4 MILLION BRIBERY AND KICKBACK SCHEME

WASHINGTON – The former commissioners of the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) and the Department of Property and Procurement (P&P) were sentenced to nine and seven years in prison, respectively, for their roles in a \$1.4 million bribery and kickback scheme, Acting Assistant Attorney General Matthew Friedrich of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Anthony J. Jenkins of the District of the Virgin Islands announced today. Chief Judge Curtis V. Gomez also ordered a money judgment of \$1,086,237 and \$960,482 against the former commissioners, respectively, and sentenced them both to three years of supervised release.

Former DPNR Commissioner Dean C. Plaskett, 43, and former P&P Commissioner Marc A. Biggs, 42, were found guilty on Feb. 27, 2008, following a two-week jury trial, of demanding and accepting bribes and kickbacks in connection with the award of a \$650,000 government contract to a shell company. Plaskett was also convicted on two counts of obstruction of justice, stemming from his efforts to conceal the bribery and kickback scheme from federal and local investigators as well as a grand jury. Specifically, evidence at trial revealed that Plaskett attempted to have fictitious documents created and backdated to falsely document work never done by the same shell company on a different government contract valued at \$130,000.

According to court documents, including the Nov. 8, 2007, indictment returned against Plaskett and Biggs, the bribery and kickback scheme began in early 2000 and continued through early 2004, and involved at least three government agencies and the award of more than \$1.4 million in government contracts. Despite little or no work having been performed on any of these contracts, Plaskett and Biggs and other government officials authorized more than \$1 million in progress payments. Plaskett, Biggs and others would then split the illicit contract proceeds. Also according to the indictment, in late 2004 and continuing through June 2005, when the bribery and kickback scheme became the subject of a joint multi-agency federal and local investigation as well as a grand jury investigation, Plaskett spearheaded a second illicit scheme designed to obstruct justice.

To date, four individuals, including three additional 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 Service employee Earl E. Brewley and Atlanta, Ga., businessman Esmond J. Modeste have pleaded guilty to conspiring to violate the federal program bribery statute, honest services mail

fraud and structuring currency transactions to further the underlying bribery and kickback scheme. Griffin was sentenced on May 3, 2007, to four years in prison; Modeste on May 16, 2007, to 30 months in prison; and Brewley on May 16, 2007, to 21 months in prison. Griffin, Modeste and Brewley were also ordered to pay restitution in the approximate amount of \$1.1 million.

Additionally, former DPNR Director of Permits Brent E. Blyden pleaded guilty to conspiring to obstruct the joint federal and local investigation and the grand jury investigation into the bribery and kickback scheme. He faces a maximum sentence of five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, \$125,000 in restitution and \$20,000 in criminal forfeiture.

This case is being prosecuted by Trial Attorneys Armando O. Bonilla, Michael Ferrara and Peter M. Koski of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section, headed by Chief William M. Welch II, in coordination with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of the Virgin Islands. Department of Justice Trial Attorney John P. Pearson participated in the investigation of this matter. The matter continues to be investigated by a task force comprised of the FBI, the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of the Inspector General. The Virgin Islands Office of the Inspector General also assisted in this investigation.

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