



Department of Justice

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KATRINA EVACUEE IN CONROE CHARGED WITH FRAUDULENTLY OBTAINING DISASTER UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

HOUSTON, TX—United States Attorney Chuck Rosenberg announced today that Edward Good, 41, a Hurricane Katrina evacuee residing in Conroe, Texas, has been charged with mail fraud in connection with his obtaining a Louisiana Department of Labor Disaster Unemployment Assistance debit card in the name of another individual who was not an evacuee. Good is the eighth person charged with fraud relating to claims filed with hurricane relief programs in the Southern District of Texas, but the first person in the district to be charged with fraud associated with Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) claims.

The investigation leading to the filing of the federal criminal complaint on January 20, 2006, began after Good was arrested by officers of the Houston Police Department (HPD) on unrelated state charges. Following that arrest, HPD officers found Good in possession of seven (7) debit cards in the names of different individuals issued by the Louisiana Department of Labor for DUA.

DUA provides financial assistance to individuals whose employment or self-employment was lost or interrupted as a direct result of a major disaster declared by the President of the United States. On August 29, 2005, President Bush declared a major disaster for Louisiana as a result of Hurricane Katrina. The Louisiana Department of Labor administers the DUA program for the State of Louisiana. Funding for the DUA program comes directly from federal funds provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). DUA benefits are available to individuals beginning after the date the major disaster began and for up to 26 weeks after the disaster declaration, as long as their unemployment continues to be a result of the major disaster. The maximum benefit amount is \$98 per week for 26 weeks for a total possible benefit of \$2,548.

The complaint alleges that Good lived in Marrero, Louisiana, until Hurricane Katrina struck and prompted his evacuation to the Conroe, Texas, area. Good first filed for DUA with the State of Louisiana in his own name and received a debit card within a few days. Thereafter, it is alleged that Good began a scheme that involved paying Conroe-area residents in cash or in drugs to obtain their identification information, which he then used to file for DUA benefits in their names listing a false prior place of employment in Louisiana. The Conroe-area residents were not Hurricane Katrina evacuees. Good would have the debit cards mailed to him and then personally use the cards bearing the names of these non-evacuees.

Houston Police officers also found Good in possession of a document containing a photocopy of the Texas driver's license of a Conroe resident and listing that Conroe resident's Social Security number, which matched the identification information submitted in the claim for one of the cards found in Good's possession.

As alleged in the complaint, investigators discovered that Good was also involved in assisting others in fraudulently obtaining DUI debit cards, resulting in his involvement in fraud totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars during the course of the scheme. The investigation is continuing.

Mail fraud carries a statutory punishment range of up to 20 years imprisonment, without parole, and a fine of up to \$250,000, upon conviction.

Good appeared before federal Magistrate Judge Nancy Johnson on Wednesday, January 25, 2006, and was informed of the federal charges. He has been returned to the State's custody on unrelated state charges pending further federal criminal proceedings.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas is a member of the Department of Justice's Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, created by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales to deter, detect and prosecute unscrupulous individuals who try to take advantage of the Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita disasters. Headed by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher, the Task Force is comprised of federal, state, and local law enforcement investigating agencies and the United States Attorney's Offices in the Gulf Coast region and nationwide. This case was investigated by the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General with assistance from the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Gregg Costa.

The public is reminded that a criminal complaint contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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