



Department of Justice

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Southern District of Alabama

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2006
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MOBILE MAN CONVICTED OF DEFRAUDING

FEMA AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA

MOBILE, AL-- A Mobile man was found guilty today of eight felony charges brought in connection with his false and fraudulent application for assistance after Hurricane Katrina, United States Attorney Deborah J. Rhodes of the Southern District of Alabama announced.

Governor Reiss, Sr., 54, was convicted by a federal jury following a two day trial and an hour of deliberation. Reiss called a FEMA hotline a month after Hurricane Katrina and claimed that his primary residence, vehicle, and personal property in New Orleans had been completely destroyed. Reiss had moved out of the house in New Orleans at least three months before the storm and was living at a house on East Lourdes Street in Mobile when Katrina struck. The New Orleans property had been foreclosed on in the months before the storm, and neither Reiss nor any of his family lived there at the time.

Based on the false claims Reiss made to FEMA, he was awarded \$12,858.00 for temporary housing and to replace his home. Reiss spent some of the housing money on a new vehicle and on visiting his daughter in California. After FEMA discovered that he did not live in New Orleans, Reiss was ordered to repay the money, but he has never done so. Reiss was convicted of making a false claim to the government, making a false statement, two counts of theft of public money, two counts of wire fraud, and two counts of aggravated identity theft. Sentencing was set for March 26, 2007 before United States District Judge William H. Steele. Reiss was taken into custody pending sentencing.

Making false claims and false statements each carry a maximum possible term of imprisonment of five years. Theft of public money is punishable by a maximum sentence of ten years, and each count of wire fraud carries a maximum penalty of 20 years' imprisonment. Each count of aggravated identity theft carries a mandatory consecutive term of imprisonment of two years. Each felony conviction is also punishable by a fine of

up to \$250,000.00 and restitution of any proceeds of the crime.

“The jury’s verdict shows that fraud and deception will not be tolerated in the Southern District of Alabama, particularly when people have taken advantage of a catastrophe to enrich themselves at the expense of others,” said Rhodes. “Our efforts to investigate and prosecute fraud in connection with Hurricane Katrina will continue.”

In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force - chaired by Assistant General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division - includes the FBI, the U.S. Inspectors General community, the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Executive Office for the United States Attorneys and others.

This case was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Daryl A. Atchison and Sean P. Costello.

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