

NEWS

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Michael Drewniak, Public Information Officer FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
973-645-2888 Oct. 10, 2007

Orange Mayor and Former Assemblyman Mims Hackett Indicted

(More)

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TRENTON – A federal grand jury today indicted former state Assemblyman and Orange Mayor Mims Hackett, Jr. on charges of attempted extortion under color of official right and bribery for allegedly accepting \$5,000 in cash in exchange for his influence on municipal contracts, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

The two-count Indictment was returned today, and largely mirrors the allegations contained in a criminal Complaint filed against Hackett on Sept. 6. On that day, Hackett and 10 other public officials and one private individual were arrested in a corruption investigation that ran from South to North Jersey.

Hackett, 65, is not scheduled to be in court today. He will be arraigned on the Indictment over the course of the next 10 days or so, after the case is assigned to a U.S. District Judge and the arraignment is scheduled.

Hackett and the others charged in September allegedly accepted payments from companies that offered insurance brokerage or roofing services to school districts and municipalities. The investigation began in mid-2006 amid evidence of corruption in the Pleasantville School District. In response, the FBI established an undercover insurance brokerage company purporting to employ the government's two cooperating witnesses and undercover agents.

Hackett first met at Orange City Hall on May 24, 2007, with the cooperating witnesses and another elected official who was a colleague of Hackett, according to the Indictment. At a lunch meeting afterward on the same day with one of the cooperating witnesses, Hackett allegedly agreed to accept a \$5,000 "upfront" payment and \$25,000 more once the City of Orange approved the undercover company to provide insurance brokerage services. The encounters that day and subsequently when Hackett allegedly accepted the \$5,000 cash payment were tape-recorded.

"My own thought on it is that we could do five thousand at the initiation and then twenty-five thousand on the back end, once everything's approved, if that works for you," one of the cooperating witnesses said on May 24, as related in the Indictment.

"Okay," said Hackett.

"Does that work for you?" asked the cooperating witness.

"Oh, yeah," said Hackett.

On Aug. 14, Hackett again met at City Hall with the cooperating witnesses, an undercover agent and the other elected official and colleague of Hackett. Following a lunch meeting at a nearby Orange restaurant, Hackett spoke privately with one of the

cooperating witnesses in an alley outside City Hall and accepted the cash payment of \$5,000 that was tucked inside a company brochure, according to the Indictment.

The attempted extortion charge carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in federal prison. The bribery count carries a statutory maximum of 10 years in prison.

Despite indictment, all defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysun Dun, with the investigation leading to today's Indictment.

The cases against Hackett and the others charged in September are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys David Bocian and Christopher J. Gramiccioni.

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Defense Counsel:
John Azzarello, Esq., Chatham