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## **VIRGIN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL PLEADS GUILTY TO OBSTRUCTING FEDERAL INVESTIGATION INTO \$1.4 MILLION BRIBERY AND KICKBACK SCHEME**

WASHINGTON – The former Director of Permits at the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) has pleaded guilty to conspiring to obstruct a federal investigation into a \$1.4 million bribery and kickback scheme, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Anthony J. Jenkins of the District of the Virgin Islands announced today.

Brent E. Blyden, 45, entered his guilty plea today before U.S. District Chief Judge Curtis V. Gomez in St. Thomas. He faces a maximum sentence of five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, and \$20,000 in criminal forfeiture.

Blyden is the Facilities Planner and Capital Projects Manager at the Virgin Islands Department of Education, and the fourth person to plead guilty in this bribery and kickback scheme engineered by territorial government officials and others to defraud the government of the U.S. Virgin Islands of approximately \$1.4 million in federal and territorial funds. Former DPNR Director of the Division of Environmental Protection Hollis L. Griffin, former Virgin Islands Fire Service employee Earl E. Brewley, and local businessman Esmond J. Modeste all previously pleaded guilty to charges relating to this bribery and kickback scheme. On May 16, 2007, Chief Judge Gomez sentenced Modeste to 30 months in prison and Brewley to 21 months in prison. Griffin was sentenced to 48 months in prison. The three defendants have been ordered to pay restitution of approximately \$1.1 million.

Blyden was charged in a one-count criminal information on Aug. 9, 2007 with conspiracy to obstruct justice. According to court documents, in early 2000, with Blyden's assistance, Griffin, Brewley, Modeste and others formed a fictitious business called Elite Technical Services (Elite), and then used it and other companies to seek and be awarded at least seven government contracts valued at approximately \$1.4 million. Although little or no actual work was performed on the contracts, which were awarded by the DPNR and the Department of Property and Procurement (DP&P) on behalf of DPNR and the Virgin Islands Fire Service, payments totaling over \$1.1 million were made to Elite and the other companies. Once the contract proceeds were paid to Elite and the other companies, Brewley, Modeste and others paid bribes and kickbacks totaling between \$300,000 and \$350,000 to at least three other territorial government officials including Blyden.

Blyden admitted to participating in an effort to create backdated false and fictitious documents designed to cover up the fact that certain contract work was never performed; creating false and fictitious documents purporting to memorialize a DPNR investigation into

Elite and the government contracts awarded to the fictitious entity; and making materially false and fictitious statements to federal and local law enforcement officials investigating the bribery and kickback scheme.

This case is being jointly prosecuted by Armando O. Bonilla and John P. Pearson of the U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division, Public Integrity Section, headed by Chief William M. Welch II. The matter continues to be investigated by a task force comprised of: the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Criminal Investigation Division of the Internal Revenue Service, 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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