

United States Attorney Paul I. Perez

Middle District of Florida

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, MAY 25, 2006
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26 ORLANDO AREA PEOPLE CHARGED WITH FEMA FRAUD

ORLANDO - Twenty-six individuals have been charged in "Operation Storm Chaser" that is aimed at detecting and prosecuting instances of fraud in Central Florida related to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, U.S. Attorney Paul I. Perez of the Middle District of Florida announced today. The charges are set forth in 23 separate indictments and in one information and include conspiracy, submission of a false claim to a governmental agency, theft of government property, mail fraud, wire fraud and making a false statement to a government agency. If convicted, the defendants face a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment for conspiracy, five years' imprisonment for submission of a false claim to a governmental agency, 10 years' imprisonment for theft of government property, 20 years' imprisonment for mail fraud, 20 years' imprisonment for wire fraud, and five years' imprisonment for making a false statement to a government agency.

Local, state and federal law enforcement officers began arresting the defendants this morning and they will be making their first appearance in Orlando federal court this afternoon. As of noon today 18 of the 26 were in custody. (See attached list of defendants).

On Aug. 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in the Gulf Coast Region of the United States. On that date, President George W. Bush declared that a major disaster existed in portions of Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Less than a month later, on Sept. 24, 2005, Hurricane Rita made landfall near the Louisiana-Texas border. On that day, President Bush declared that a major disaster existed in portions of Louisiana and Texas.

After those disaster declarations were made, people in the affected areas became eligible to apply for disaster assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Different forms of disaster assistance were made available by FEMA for those people located in the affected areas. Because many people were displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, FEMA provided a streamlined process for victims to receive expedited assistance in the form of a \$2,000 disbursement. To obtain such expedited assistance, a person could apply by calling a toll-free telephone number for FEMA, by sending an application by using the Internet, or by applying in person. Each applicant for expedited assistance was asked to provide their name, Social Security number, current and pre-disaster addresses, and telephone numbers, among other things. If approved, an applicant could choose whether to receive their FEMA disaster assistance by a check that would be mailed to an address selected by the applicant or by a wire transfer that would be sent to a bank account selected by the applicant.

The only people entitled to receive disaster assistance from FEMA for Hurricanes Katrina or Rita were those people whose primary residence was located in one of the areas that was designated as being affected

adversely by one of those major declared disasters. At no time was any county in the Middle District of Florida included in the areas of the country for which residents were eligible to obtain disaster assistance from FEMA for Hurricanes Katrina or Rita.

During the investigative phase of Operation "Storm Chaser," federal agents discovered a number of applications for FEMA disaster assistance that appeared to have been submitted on behalf of Central Florida residents who did not live in any of the affected areas that were eligible to apply for disaster assistance from FEMA for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Further investigation revealed that the 26 individuals charged in Operation "Storm Chaser" submitted fraudulent claims to FEMA totaling more than \$170,000. Of that amount, they were successful in obtaining more than \$150,000 in FEMA funds. The 26 charged in Operation "Storm Chaser" were involved in fraudulent claims as little as \$2,000 and as much as over \$100,000.

"As announced by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales when he visited New Orleans on October 20th of last year, the Justice Department has a 'zero tolerance' policy for FEMA fraud," said U.S. Attorney Perez. "In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, our nation came together to support the people whose lives were devastated by those disasters. People who took advantage of that generosity by engaging in fraud can not be allowed to get away with it. As we enter a new hurricane season next week, we will aggressively pursue anyone who attempts to take advantage of a natural disaster to defraud FEMA or anyone else."

These cases were investigated by the United States Secret Service, the United States Postal Inspection Service, and the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, with assistance from the U.S. Marshal's Service. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Roger B. Handberg.

These cases are part of the effort by the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force to prosecute disaster-related crimes from last year's hurricanes. The Task Force was created in September 2005 by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales to deter, investigate, and prosecute federal crimes arising from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force - chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division, includes members of the Secret Service, the Postal Inspector's Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others.

An indictment or information is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.

Names of Defendants Charged in Operation Storm Chaser

*Ronald R. Tarver, 42, Eustis, Florida, 15 checks and 4 wire transfers totaling \$46,749.51

Ronnie Lee McNeil, 42, Apopka, Florida, 5 checks totaling \$10,000

*Preston Angelo Williams, 38, Orlando, Florida, 4 checks totaling \$16,858

*Jacqueline M. Collington, 29, Apopka, Florida, 6 checks totaling \$12,000

William Lewis Clark, 43, Orlando, Florida, 5 checks totaling \$10,000

Marvin Lee Williams, 61, Plymouth, Florida, 3 checks totaling \$6,358

Dedrick Delano Franks, 41, Plymouth, Florida, 3 checks totaling \$6,000

*Fredrick Deon Harrell, 26, Plymouth, Florida, 3 checks totaling \$6,000

Lorenzo Vanlenoor Moody, 36, Apopka, Florida, 3 checks totaling \$4,554

Leroy Rufus Scarlett, 21, Plymouth, Florida, 2 checks totaling \$4,000

Anthony George Cherry, 37, Plymouth, Florida, 2 checks totaling \$4,000

Herbert Neal, 35, Plymouth, Florida, 2 checks totaling \$4,000

Clarence Malcom Williams, 39, Mount Dora, Florida, 2 checks totaling \$4,000

Antwan Derrell Harper, 21, Plymouth, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000

*Karen Rachel Smith, 31, Zellwood, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000
*Katrina Rachelle Smith, 31, Plymouth, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000
*Sabrina Seline Smith, 28, Zellwood, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000
Annette Harrell, 41, Plymouth, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000
Darrell Lamont Harrell, 22, Plymouth, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000
*Felicia Lafaye Harrell, 24, Plymouth, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000
Rodney Lamar Bridges, 38, Apopka, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000
Samuel J. Scarlett, 20, Plymouth, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000
Donna Lynette Simmons, 41, Apopka, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000
Monica Martres Simmons, 25, Apopka, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000
Timothy Lofton Mosley, 35, Apopka, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000
Melani Jamianicole Brown, 18, Apopka, Florida, 1 check totaling \$2,000

*** Not in Custody as of noon today.**

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