



**Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas**

Donald J. DeGabrielle, Jr. • United States Attorney

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JOHN YEMBRICK
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(713) 567-9388

**FEDERAL AIR MARSHAL PLEADS GUILTY TO THEFT
OF GOVERNMENT MONEY**

HOUSTON, TX - Federal Air Marshal Patrick H. Hightower, II was convicted today of theft of government money, United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle announced.

At a hearing held today before United States District Judge Kenneth Ellison, Hightower admitted that he and Burlie L. Sholar, a former colleague, doctored hotel-lodging receipts to look as if both had been charged for lodging even though only one person actually paid for the lodging. Hightower estimated that he and Sholar had submitted fraudulent travel vouchers using this process approximately 20 to 24 times since September 2005. Hightower pleaded guilty to stealing less than \$1,000 through the use of doctored receipts. As a condition of his plea agreement, Hightower has agreed to immediately resign from his employment as a federal air marshal.

Judge Ellison convicted Hightower after he pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor federal offense of theft of government money in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 641. Judge Ellison has scheduled sentencing for September 8, 2006, at 1:30 p.m. At sentencing, Hightower faces a maximum punishment of one year imprisonment and a \$100,000 fine.

Hightower came to the attention of law enforcement on February 9, 2006, after the discovery of doctored lodging receipts in the name of Hightower and Federal Air Marshal Burlie L. Sholar, III during a search incident to the arrest of Sholar for drug trafficking and bribery. Hightower testified at a hearing on Sholar's behalf and was confronted with the evidence during cross examination by Assistant United States Attorney Mark McIntyre.

Hightower admitted his illegal conduct regarding the vouchers in subsequent interviews with Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General agents on February 16 and February 24, 2006.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Mark McIntyre.

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