

Subject: Middle District of Louisiana United States Attorney's Office Press Release

14 December 2005 - **FEMA Fraud Whittaker**

ARREST FOR FRAUD IN OBTAINING DISASTER UNEMPLOYMENT DEBIT CARDS

BATON ROUGE, LA - United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced that DREWEY PIERRE WHITTAKER, age 44, formerly of Villa Rica, Georgia, was arrested in Albany, Georgia, yesterday on a criminal complaint alleging wire fraud and false use of Social Security numbers to obtain fifty disaster unemployment debit cards for alleged losses resulting from Hurricane Katrina.

The criminal complaint, unsealed in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, alleges that, based upon applications filed with the Louisiana Department of Labor, fifty disaster unemployment debit cards were mailed to a post office box in Villa Rica, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta. The complaint alleges that WHITTAKER applied for the post office box, and that when confronted by postal authorities, WHITTAKER said he was picking up the cards for relatives of his wife. The complaint alleges that 49 of the 50 claims for unemployment assistance had the same date of birth, all had the last name of Ramirez or Garcia, and all the Social Security numbers were the same, except for one or two digits.

The subject debit cards were issued by the Louisiana Department of Labor as Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA). DUA provides financial assistance to individuals whose employment has been lost or interrupted as a result of a major disaster declared by the President of the United States. The Louisiana Department of Labor administers the DUA program for the State of Louisiana, the funding for which comes from federal funds provided by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA). This arrest brings to seventeen the total number of defendants who have been charged in the Middle District of Louisiana with violations related to FEMA relief funds.

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 Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division - includes members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the Postal Inspector's Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others.

The case is being investigated by Special Agents of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; the Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General; and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Assistant U.S. Attorney Alan Dasher is handling the court appearance in Georgia and Assistant U.S. Attorney Ian Hipwell is prosecuting the case in Baton Rouge.

For further information, contact David R. Dugas, U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of

Louisiana, or Lyman Thornton, First Assistant U.S. Attorney, at (225) 389-0443.

NOTE: A complaint is merely an accusation by a law enforcement official, and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty at trial.