

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Nov. 17, 2009

Ex-Secaucus Mayor and Political Associate Ronald Manzo
Indicted for Allegedly Accepting \$15,000 in Corrupt Payments

(More)

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NEWARK – Former Secaucus Mayor Dennis Elwell and political associate Ronald Manzo were indicted today in connection with Elwell’s acceptance, through Manzo, of a corrupt \$10,000 cash payment made in exchange for Elwell’s agreement to provide official assistance on real estate development matters in Secaucus, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

The Indictment charges that Elwell and Manzo conspired with each other, then-Jersey City official Edward Cheatam, and others to extort cash payments from a government cooperating witness (CW), with the promise that Elwell would help the CW obtain development approvals in Secaucus. According to the Indictment, Manzo accepted a separate \$5,000 cash payment in exchange for his assistance in setting up the corrupt arrangement with Elwell.

The Indictment stems from an undercover FBI political corruption and international money laundering investigation that became public on July 23. Elwell, Manzo, and Cheatam were all charged in criminal Complaints on that day.

This is the second Indictment naming Ronald Manzo. One was returned on Oct. 6 against Manzo and his brother Louis, related to the Manzos’ alleged acceptance of \$27,500 in corrupt cash payments in exchange for Louis Manzo’s anticipated official assistance on development matters once he became mayor of Jersey City.

Fishman said the corruption and money laundering investigations are continuing.

Cheatam already has pleaded guilty based on his own acceptance of bribes from the CW and his role in facilitating bribes and illicit campaign contributions to other public officials and political figures.

According to the Indictment, Elwell, Manzo, and Cheatam met on May 28, 2009, at a restaurant in Secaucus. During the meeting, Elwell was informed by the CW that he was “trying to make a relationship” with Elwell and that “[a]nything I do, I’ll do through” Manzo. Elwell responded, “Right, right.” Elwell was then informed by the CW that he would give Manzo \$10,000 for Elwell’s benefit and that he would “do another \$10,000 after the primary,” which was to be held on June 2, 2009. Elwell responded, “Okay.” Elwell was informed that in exchange for these payments, the understanding was that Elwell would “support [the CW’s] stuff” and “[e]xpedit[e] [the CW’s] applications.” Elwell nodded his head affirmatively in response.

Immediately after the meeting, in the parking lot outside the restaurant, Manzo accepted from the CW a \$10,000 cash payment intended for Elwell. Manzo then went back inside the restaurant and rejoined Elwell.

At a meeting five days later, attended by Manzo, Cheatam, and the CW, Manzo confirmed that Elwell had received the corrupt \$10,000 cash payment and was happy with it, writing on a napkin, “Yes. No problem,” when the CW asked whether Elwell had received the money.

Also according to the Indictment, Elwell himself confirmed his receipt of the corrupt \$10,000 cash payment at a meeting held on July 17, 2009, and attended by Elwell, Manzo, Cheatam, and

the CW. At that meeting, Elwell was informed by the CW that the CW would provide Elwell with an additional \$10,000 payment after the November general election. Elwell responded, "Okay." When the CW asked whether Elwell was "fine with" the \$10,000 payment made on May 28, Elwell responded, "Yes," and confirmed that he had received the money from Manzo. Elwell then thanked the CW and shook his hand.

The Indictment charges Elwell and Manzo with one count of conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right, which carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine; one count of attempted extortion, which also carries a maximum of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine; and one count of accepting corrupt payments in connection with a business or transaction or series of transactions with the Town of Secaucus, an entity receiving more than \$10,000 in federal funds during a specified one-year period, which carries a maximum statutory penalty of ten years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Fishman credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, and the IRS Criminal Investigation Division, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge William P. Offord, for the investigation of Elwell, Ronald Manzo, and the other defendants. Fishman also thanked the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Luis A. Valentin, for their assistance in the investigation.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Rachael A. Honig.

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Defense counsel:

Dennis Elwell - Thomas Cammarata, Esq. Jersey City

Ronald Manzo - Samuel R. DeLuca, Esq. Jersey City