

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 24, 2009

Former Ocean Township Sewerage Authority Chairman
Sentenced to One Year in Federal Prison for Taking Bribes

(More)

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NEWARK – The former chairman of the Ocean Township Sewerage Authority was sentenced today to 12 months in federal prison for accepting \$15,000 in corrupt payments from civil engineer Howard Schoor as a reward for favoring Schoor’s firm on large contracts with the authority, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra., Jr., announced.

U.S. District Judge William H. Walls also ordered Stephen D. Kessler, 67, of Ocean Township, Monmouth County, to pay a fine of \$10,000. Judge Walls ordered Kessler to surrender to the federal Bureau of Prisons by May 26 to begin serving his prison sentence.

Kessler pleaded guilty in July 2005 and admitted that he and an elected official from Ocean Township – (then-Mayor Terrence Weldon), who was also serving on the Sewerage Authority – negotiated the corrupt payments in late 2000 with the engineering company representative (Schoor).

(At the time of Kessler’s guilty plea, neither Weldon nor Schoor were specifically identified, though both later pleaded guilty in connection with the corrupt payment scheme.)

In sentencing Kessler, Judge Walls took favorably into account Kessler’s cooperation in the investigation of Schoor and Louis Gartz, the former auditor and accountant for the Sewerage Authority and for Ocean Township, and others. The government also recommended a sentence reduction in view of his cooperation.

Kessler admitted at his guilty plea that he received the money from Schoor in several payments, including a final payment in November 2001, at the annual League of Municipalities Convention in Atlantic City. Kessler said he split the money between him and Weldon.

Kessler pleaded guilty to a one-count Information charging him with extortion under color of official right.

Kessler also admitted at his guilty plea that while chairman of the Sewerage Authority, he accepted payments from Gartz. Kessler said those payments, which came to him through Weldon, were in return for their official influence to benefit Gartz’s accounting firm, including continuing the firm’s status as accountant to the Sewerage Authority.

Marra credited Special Agents of the FBI Red Bank Resident Agency, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, with their investigation of Kessler and others in Monmouth County.

The case was handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney James B. Nobile, chief of the U.S. Attorney’s Office Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

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Defense Counsel: Michael D'Alessio, Jr., Esq. West Orange