

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Former Pleasantville School Board President
And a Board Member Admit Extortion

(More)

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Breaking News (NJ) <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/nj/press/index.html>

CAMDEN – Former Pleasantville Board of Education president Jayson G. Adams and Pleasantville Board of Education member Rafael Velez pleaded guilty today to attempted extortion, both admitting that they accepted bribes from an undercover insurance brokerage company and a cooperating roofing company in return for their official assistance in steering public contracts to the companies, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Jayson Adams, 27, and Rafael Velez, 46, both pleaded guilty to separate one-count criminal Informations charging attempted extortion under color of official right before U.S. District Judge Jerome B. Simandle. Under the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, Adams faces a probable range of between 63 and 78 months in federal prison. Velez's faces probable range of between 37 and 46 months in federal prison.

Adams and Velez both are free on \$200,000 bond pending their sentencings, which are scheduled for Feb. 1.

Adams and Velez were arrested on Sept. 6, along with nine other public officials and one private citizen which resulted from a public corruption investigation that progressed from southern to northern New Jersey.

At his plea hearing, Adams admitted that he accepted numerous corrupt payments totaling approximately \$62,200 between May 2006 and October 2006. Adams admitted that during this time period he also agreed to accept corrupt payments in the form of a share of the profits generated by the insurance brokerage business as a result of contracts obtained from the Pleasantville Board of Education (PBOE).

Adams also admitted arranging corrupt payments for other public officials in Pleasantville and elsewhere in return for steering insurance and roofing contracts to the businesses. Adams was present on May 24, 2006, when Maurice "Pete" Callaway, 53, a fellow member of the PBOE, accepted a corrupt payment of \$10,000 from a cooperating witness in exchange for his official assistance in obtaining roofing work from the PBOE.

On Sept. 6, 2006, Adams identified five members of the PBOE, including himself, who he would distribute corrupt payments to in exchange for their vote on a resolution to award an insurance contract to an insurance brokerage business, he admitted. Prior to that date, Adams admitted that he promised that in exchange for voting to award the insurance contract to the brokerage business, Rafael Velez, Maurice Callaway, James Pressley and James McCormick would receive corrupt payments.

On Sept. 12, 2006, as a consequence of the corrupt agreement, Adams admitted that he and the four other PBOE members voted to pass the resolution authorizing the insurance contract for the brokerage.

At Velez's plea hearing, he admitted that he had agreed to accept corrupt payments of \$15,000 in exchange for his support of PBOE contracts with the insurance brokerage business and the roofing business. Velez admitted that on Sept. 12, he and four other members of the PBOE voted to pass a resolution authorizing the insurance brokerage business to provide insurance services. On Sept. 28 Velez accepted a corrupt cash payment of \$4,000 in exchange for voting for the insurance contract, he admitted. At that time, he solicited additional corrupt payments, he admitted.

As part of their guilty pleas, Adams and Velez agreed to forfeit \$62,200 and \$4,000, respectively.

The charge to which Adams and Velez pleaded guilty carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. However, in determining an actual sentence, Judge Simandle will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors, including acceptance of responsibility. The judge, however, has wide discretion and is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, for the investigation against Steele and the other defendants. He also credited for their assistance in the investigation prosecutors and investigators with the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Theodore F.L. Housel.

The cases against Steele and the other defendants are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys David Bocian and Christopher J. Gramiccioni.

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Defense Counsel:
Adams - Harold B. Shapiro, Esq. Vineland
Velez - Jerome Ballarotto, Esq. Trenton