



Department of Justice

Acting United States Attorney Tim Johnson

Southern District of Texas

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WOMAN WHO FILED FRAUDULENT KATRINA, RITA AND IKE CLAIMS SENTENCED TO LENGTHY PRISON TERM

(HOUSTON) – A Houston woman convicted of mail fraud and aggravated identity theft for her conduct in filing fraudulent claims for FEMA assistance for Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Ike has been sentenced to almost five years in federal prison without parole, acting United States Attorney Tim Johnson announced today. The 57-month sentence imposed today by U.S. District Judge David Hittner on Phyllis Ann Taylor, 28, of Houston, is equal to the longest sentence imposed in the Southern District of Texas for FEMA fraud relating to Hurricane Katrina and is one of the lengthiest sentences imposed nationwide.

At a hearing this morning, Judge Hittner sentenced Taylor to a 33-month prison term for her mail fraud conviction and a consecutive 24-month prison term for her aggravated identity theft conviction. The sentence imposed for the mail fraud conviction constitutes an upward departure from the calculated guidelines range. The court based its decision to increase the sentence based on Taylor's extensive criminal history and her conduct in this case which Judge Hittner characterized as having "lacked sensitivity and empathy" because it took advantage of programs intended to assist actual hurricane victims. The court also ordered Taylor to pay restitution in the amount of \$58,913 and ordered her to serve a three-year-term of supervised release upon her release from prison. Taylor has been in federal custody since her arrest in September 2008.

Taylor was responsible for filing a dozen claims with FEMA for Katrina and Rita assistance using slight variations of her name. After the first claim in which she listed her actual residence at the time of Katrina in Marrero, La., Taylor began using false damaged residences in New Orleans for the Katrina claims and Lake Charles for the Rita claims. After the first claim in which she used her actual Social Security number, Taylor used other Social Security numbers, all of which were actually assigned to other individuals, in subsequent claims. Taylor had the FEMA checks mailed

to her in Houston where she relocated after Katrina. Then in 2008, after Hurricane Ike, Taylor filed a claim falsely stating that she resided in Galveston, but that fraudulent claim was discovered before it was paid.

This case was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (OIG) with assistance from the Department of Housing and Urban Development OIG. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Gregg Costa.

Eighty-nine defendants have been charged in the Southern District with fraud relating to Hurricanes Katrina, Rita or Ike. Taylor was the first charged with fraud involving Ike. The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas is a member of the Department of Justice's Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, created to deter, detect and prosecute unscrupulous individuals who try to take advantage of the Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita disasters. The Task Force is comprised of federal, state and local law enforcement investigating agencies and the United States Attorney's Offices in the Gulf Coast region and nationwide.

Anyone suspecting criminal activity involving disaster assistance programs can make an anonymous report by calling the toll-free Hurricane Relief Fraud Hotline, 1-866-720-5721 or contacting the Disaster Fraud Fax at 1-225-334-4707 or the Disaster Fraud e-mail at disaster@leo.gov, 24 hours a day, seven days a week until further notice. Information can also be e-mailed to the inspector general at dhsorghotline@dhs.gov or sent by surface mail, with as many details as possible, to:

National Center for Disaster Fraud
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-4909
or
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC. 20528
Attn: Office of Inspector General, Hotline.

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