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THIBODAUX, LOUISIANA MAN SENTENCED FOR FEMA FRAUD

Charged with fraudulently obtaining FEMA relief funds

Lafayette, Louisiana . . . A man who falsely claimed that a home he owned in Welsh, Louisiana, had been damaged by Hurricane Rita was sentenced today in U.S. District Court in Lake Charles, Louisiana, United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced. **PETER FONTENOT**, age 43, of Thibodaux, Louisiana, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Patricia Minaldi to spend 4 months in prison, followed by 3 years of supervised release. During his supervised release, FONTENOT is also required to perform 300 hours of community service.

U.S. Attorney Donald Washington stated: "We remain fully committed to a policy of no tolerance as to cases involving fraud in the acquisition of federal disaster relief funds. None of us should tolerate those who steal disaster relief funds. The cumulative impact of thousands of these criminals causes severe harm to our nation's ability to make life supporting funds available to those who suffer from disasters, now and in the future."

FONTENOT pled guilty in March to theft of public money as a result of the indictment which was returned in December 2005. FONTENOT submitted a false application to FEMA in

October 2005 claiming that he lived in an evacuated area and that his home had been damaged due to Hurricane Rita. Based on the application, FEMA sent FONTENOT a check for \$2,000.

A follow-up investigation by federal authorities revealed that FONTENOT did not live at the address of the residence which he claimed was damaged and that the residence did not exist. It had been demolished several years prior to Hurricane Rita making landfall because of its poor condition.

Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. United States Sentencing Guidelines established by the United States Congress and the United States Sentencing Commission are only used as guidelines by the judge in determining the appropriate sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney John Luke Walker and was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Lafayette/Lake Charles Resident Agency.

To date, the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Louisiana has charged 23 defendants with violations related to FEMA relief funds, and more than 130 FEMA fraud investigations are on-going in the Western District of Louisiana.

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.

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