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## KNOTT COUNTY, KY., JUDGE EXECUTIVE SENTENCED ON VOTE-BUYING CONSPIRACY CHARGES

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Assistant Attorney General Christopher A. Wray of the Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Gregory F. Van Tatenhove of the Eastern District of Kentucky, and FBI Special Agent in Charge David D. Elder of Kentucky announced today that Knott County Judge Executive Donnie Newsome has been sentenced for leading a conspiracy to buy votes in the May 26, 1998 primary election in Knott County, Kentucky.

Newsome, 53, of Dema, Kentucky, was sentenced this afternoon by District Judge Danny C. Reeves at U.S. District Court in Pikeville, Kentucky, to 26 months in prison and a \$20,000 fine. Judge Reeves also sentenced a co-conspirator, Willard Smith, 55, of Hindman, Kentucky, to two years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

Newsome was in office as an elected State Representative in 1998 when he successfully ran for his current office in the May primary election. County Judge Executives are the chief executive officers for Kentucky counties, with control over most county services and employment. Smith was a key supporter of Newsome in that election. The ballot in that primary election also included candidates for the United States Senate, although the vote-buying offenses of which Newsome and Smith were convicted were not directed at influencing that Senate race.

Newsome and Smith were convicted by a jury at trial on Oct. 1, 2003, on charges of conspiring to buy votes and vote buying. The jury found that Newsome and Smith, working together and with other conspirators, approached and paid numerous impoverished, handicapped, illiterate or otherwise impaired persons to vote for Newsome and others by absentee ballot, resulting in a large increase in the rate of absentee voting, and long lines at the County Clerk's Office. Newsome won the election in 1998 and a subsequent election in 2002, and is the current County Judge Executive. Newsome has been detained pending sentencing as a result of alleged threats to government witnesses during his trial.

The case was the result of an extensive federal investigation into vote-buying on both sides of the May 1998 primary election in Knott County, Kentucky. The Democratic primary, which has traditionally determined the outcome of the general election, was contested by two slates of candidates. The investigation, which involved hundreds of interviews in remote locations, was headed by the FBI Resident Agency in Pikeville, Kentucky. In 2003 and 2004, this investigation resulted in the indictment of 10 people in seven cases, the conviction of Newsome and Smith by a jury at trial, the guilty pleas of five other Knott County men, and the acquittal of three defendants.

"Judge Newsome and his conspirators tried to cheat Kentucky voters out of fair and untainted elections," said Assistant Attorney General Wray. "The Department of Justice will investigate and prosecute vote fraud as long and as hard as necessary to protect the election process."

U.S. Attorney Gregory F. Van Tatenhove said, "These cases are a priority in the Eastern District of Kentucky as we seek to guarantee elections free from fraud."

The prosecution was part of the Attorney General's Ballot Integrity Initiative, a Public Integrity Section-led program to insure open, fair, and honest elections through the vigorous investigation and prosecution of election crimes.

The United States was represented by Trial Attorney Richard C. Pilger of the Public Integrity Section at the Department of Justice, headed by Section Chief Noel L. Hillman, and Assistant United States Attorneys Thomas L. Self and Kenneth R. Taylor.

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