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Former Dodge County Sheriff and Deputy Plead Guilty to 2004 Election Fraud

U.S. Attorney's Office

March 12, 2010

Southern District of Georgia

(912) 652-4422

SAVANNAH, GA—Edward J. Tarver, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia, announced today that former Dodge County Sheriff MICHAEL LAWTON DOUGLAS, JR., age 38, of Eastman, Georgia, and former Dodge County Deputy Sheriff OLIN NORMAN GIBSON a/k/a “Bobo,” age 43, of Helena, Georgia, pled guilty yesterday before U.S. District Judge Dudley H. Bowen, Jr. at the U.S. Courthouse in Dublin, Georgia, in connection with election fraud during Douglas’s first campaign for Dodge County sheriff in 2004.

Douglas won the Democratic nomination for sheriff following a primary election held on July 20, 2004, and a primary run-off election held on August 10, 2004. Douglas won the primary runoff election by approximately 400 votes. He ran unopposed in the general election held November 2, 2004, and was thereby elected sheriff. Douglas served as Dodge County sheriff following election in 2004 until his re-election campaign was defeated in 2008.

On Thursday, Douglas pled guilty to conspiring to buy votes and to vote more than once in connection with the 2004 sheriff election, in violation of federal law. Gibson pled guilty to buying a vote for Douglas in connection with that election. At the change-of-plea hearing, the government presented evidence that Douglas himself provided money to various supporters, including Gibson, to be used to buy votes—that is, to pay voters to vote for him in the election. The evidence also revealed that Douglas supporters paid voters for their absentee ballots, and in particular blank absentee ballots, then filled those ballots out with votes for Douglas and cast them in the election.

Douglas and Gibson each face a maximum statutory penalty of five years’ imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, and three years of supervised release. Both Douglas and Gibson remain on bond pending their sentencing hearing, which has not yet been scheduled.

U.S. Attorney Tarver recognized the extensive cooperative efforts of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and Federal Bureau of Investigation in bringing this criminal activity to light. He praised particularly the tireless efforts of GBI Special Agent Eve Rodgers and FBI Special Agent Ed Sutcliff, the lead case agents assigned to the investigation. According to Tarver, “Election fraud strikes at the very heart of our democracy, and this office and our law enforcement partners are committed to punishing those who seek to steal or dilute the power of each voter to participate meaningfully in civic society.”

The government was represented in this case by Assistant United States Attorneys Brian Tanner and Joe Newman.

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