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First sentences handed down in East St. Louis vote buying scheme

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Two women who were convicted in June for their role in a vote buying scheme in East St. Louis in November 2004 were sentenced on Monday.

Sheila Thomas, 33, of East St. Louis was sentenced to a term 18 months in jail, a fine of \$200, a \$200 special assessment, and a two-year term of supervised release to follow her incarceration.

Thomas was convicted following a 17-day jury trial of one count of conspiring with others to buy votes and one count of aiding and abetting vote buying.

Also sentenced was Yvette Johnson, 47, of Centreville. Johnson also was convicted by the jury of one count of conspiring to pay voters for voting and one count of aiding and abetting vote buying.

She was sentenced to a term of two years probation with a condition that the first five months of that sentence be served as home confinement. Johnson also was ordered to pay a \$200 fine and a \$200 special assessment.

U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois Edward E. McNally announced the sentencing in U.S. District Court.

Evidence showed that Thomas was the elected Democratic Precinct Committeeman for the 17th Precinct in East St. Louis and that she and certain other Democratic precinct committeemen conspired with each other and with other precinct workers to pay voters for voting in the 2004 general election in amounts ranging from \$5 to \$10 per vote.

Specifically, the evidence showed that codefendant Charles Powell, Jr., who was the chairman of the East St. Louis Democratic Party, used three precinct committeemen meetings in October 2005, to instruct East St. Louis' Democratic precinct committeemen to use money obtained from the St. Clair County Democratic Party to pay voters for voting in the election.

The evidence showed that the three races that the conspirators were attempting to influence were the races for president, justice of the Illinois Supreme Court and chairman of the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners.

Powell also was convicted by the same jury of conspiring to buy votes and is scheduled for sentencing on Feb. 13, 2006.

The United States had recommended that Thomas receive a sentence within the guideline range established by the United States Sentencing Commission, which was between 18 and 24 months.

Evidence presented at trial showed that Johnson was a precinct worker in East St. Louis' 25th precinct, which was the precinct of co-defendant Kelvin Ellis, the former director of Regulatory Affairs for East St. Louis.

The evidence showed that Johnson was instructed by Ellis to pay voters in amounts ranging from \$5 to \$10. Ellis also was convicted of conspiring to buy votes and is scheduled for sentencing on Feb. 6.

The United States had recommended that Johnson receive a sentence within the guideline range established by the United States Sentencing Commission, which was between 10 and 16 months, but which also permits the Court to direct that up to half of the sentence be served in community confinement or

