

December 16, 2014

# Former Mayor of Martin Sentenced to 90 Months for Civil Rights Offenses, Fraud, Vote Buying, and Identity Theft

PIKEVILLE, KY—The former Mayor of Martin, Ky., has been sentenced to 90 months in federal prison for various crimes including civil rights offenses and identity theft.

On Monday, U.S. District Judge Amul Thapar sentenced the former mayor, Ruth Thomasine Robinson, 70, for conspiracy to violate civil rights, conspiracy to defraud the Social Security Administration, federal program fraud, aggravated identity theft and vote buying. Judge Thapar also sentenced Robinson's husband, James "Red" Robinson, 64, to 40 months in prison for vote buying. Under federal law, the Robinsons must serve at least 85 percent of their respective prison sentences.

Thomasine Robinson was convicted in May of the vote buying and civil rights violations. According to evidence at the trial, Thomasine Robinson and her co-conspirators intimidated poor and disabled citizens in order to gain their votes during Robinson's 2012 campaign for re-election. For instance, members of the conspiracy directed residents of public housing to vote by absentee ballot under the supervision of Thomasine Robinson or another member of the conspiracy.

The conspirators also targeted residents of private housing owned and leased by

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Trial testimony established that the conspirators completed absentee ballots, marking their choice of candidates, and instructing the voters to sign the pre-marked ballots. Voters who complied by voting for Thomasine Robinson received promises of better living arrangements and other considerations. Voters who did not comply faced eviction or the loss of priority for public housing. In addition, the evidence established that the defendants offered to pay several voters to vote for Thomasine Robinson.

Thomasine Robinson was convicted in February of the identity theft and fraud offenses. Evidence at the trial established that from 2006 until January 2013, Ginger Marie Halbert, a co-conspirator, was purportedly working on a volunteer basis with Thomasine Robinson; in reality, Halbert was secretly being paid with federal funds. The funds used to pay Halbert were intended for the Martin Community Center and the Martin Housing Authority. Some of the misdirected money was supposed to fund an after school program for city children. To conceal the scheme, the defendants allegedly arranged for the checks to be made payable to Halbert's son.

Kerry B. Harvey, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky; Howard S. Marshall, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Guy Fallen, Special Agent in Charge, Social Security Administration, Office of the Investigator General, Office of Investigations; and Jack Conway, Attorney General of Kentucky, jointly made the announcement today.

The investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Social Security Administration, and the Kentucky Attorney General's Office. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Ken Taylor and Andy Boone prosecuted this case on behalf of the federal government.

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