

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Former Executive Director of VI Legislature Sentenced To 5 Yrs In Prison For Bribery And Extortion

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St. Thomas – The former Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Legislature was sentenced to five years in prison today, Assistant Attorney General Leslie R. Caldwell of the U.S. Justice Department's Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Ronald W. Sharpe have announced.

Today's sentence should serve as a reminder to public officials of the consequences when they seek to use their office for personal gain and unjust enrichment. -- U.S. Attorney Ronald W. Sharpe.

Louis "Lolo" Willis, 57, a resident of St. Thomas, was sentenced by District Court Judge Curtis V. Gomez.

On November 19, 2014, a federal jury convicted Willis of four counts of federal programs bribery and extortion under color of official right.

"Public corruption tears at the fabric of any society that operates under a system of laws. That is why it is one of the US Attorney's Office's highest priorities." U.S. Attorney Sharpe said. "Willis' corrupt and criminal acts violated the public trust. Fortunately, through the hard work of our local and federal law enforcement partners, he has been held accountable.

"Today's sentence should serve as a reminder to public officials of the consequences when they seek to use their office for personal gain and unjust enrichment," he added.

According to evidence presented at trial, Willis was the executive director of the Legislature between 2009 and 2012. His responsibilities included oversight of the major renovation of the Legislature building and awarding and entering into government contracts in connection with the project. Willis was also responsible for authorizing payments to the contractors for their work.

Evidence presented at trial demonstrated that Willis accepted bribes, including \$13,000 in cash and checks, from contractors in exchange for using his official position to secure more than \$350,000 in work for the contractors and to ensure they received payment upon completion.

The case was investigated by the FBI's San Juan Field Office's St. Thomas Resident Agency, the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation and the Office of the Virgin Islands Inspector General. It's being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Justin Weitz of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section, Trial Attorney Traccee Plowell of the Criminal Division's Office of Enforcement Operations, Trial Attorney Jennifer Blackwell of the Environment and Natural Resources Division's Environmental Crimes Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Delia Smith of the District of the Virgin Islands.

Feature Image: The Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall in St. Thomas