

The Virgin Islands Consortium

United States Attorney Ronald Sharpe Announces Resignation

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ST. THOMAS -- United States Attorney Ronald W. Sharpe, above, has announced his resignation effective midnight on March 10, 2017, the office of the U.S. Attorney, Virgin Islands District announced this afternoon. First Assistant U.S. Attorney Joycelyn Hewlett has been named Acting United States Attorney for the District of the Virgin Islands. Mr. Sharpe served as U.S. Attorney since September 2009.

Mr. Sharpe resigned on the same day that President Donald Trump [abruptly ordered 46 Obama-era holdover attorneys general to resign](#), following increasing calls from Trump allies urging the president to act. Mr. Trump has been angered by multiple reports based on leaks coming from the sprawling government bureaucracy, and has expressed fears

of a deep state within the government working overtime to derail his administration. The president has also accused Mr. Obama of [wiretapping his phones at the Trump Tower the month before the election](#), accusations that Mr. Trump has yet to provide proof of. The accusations were flatly denied by Mr. Obama.

In today's release, Mr. Sharpe said serving as U.S. attorney in the territory was among the highlights of his life.

"To serve as United States Attorney for the District of the Virgin Islands has been the highest honor of my professional career," Mr. Sharpe said. "Every day, I was inspired by the dedication of the attorneys and members of the United States Attorney's Office, to do my best to represent the residents of the Virgin Islands and defend the rule of law. I am extremely proud of the work the United States Attorney's Office has accomplished in and out of the courtroom, including building meaningful bonds of trust with the community we serve. I am confident that the extraordinary professionals of the United States Attorney's Office will remain tirelessly devoted to the pursuit of justice on behalf of the residents of the Virgin Islands and our great nation."

Mr. Sharpe, a graduate of Tulane University and Stanford Law School, began his career with the U.S. Department of Justice in 1995, serving as an assistant United States attorney in the District of Columbia. Mr. Sharpe had previously served as first assistant United States Attorney in the District of the Virgin Islands. During his tenure as United States attorney, Mr. Sharpe served on the Attorney General's Advisory Committee (AGAC), and on several subcommittees of the AGAC, including the Borders and Immigration Subcommittee and the Environmental Crimes Working Group. Mr. Sharpe also served as the chairperson of the Puerto Rico/USVI High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program.

When he assumed the role of United States Attorney, Mr. Sharpe designated the top priorities of the district, including aggressively fighting public corruption, which historically has challenged law enforcement's efforts to effectively address crime in the Virgin Islands. This focus led to significant prosecutions that have enabled federal and local law enforcement and other government institutions operating in the Virgin Islands to enforce the rule of law and strengthen their resistance to continued corruption. Some of the significant public corruption cases handled by the office over the past seven years include:

- Roberto Tapia, a former director of Environmental Enforcement for the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR), was sentenced to 70 months in prison for using DPNR as a criminal enterprise to engage in illegal drug trafficking activities including the possession and trafficking of numerous kilos of cocaine.
- Louis "Lolo" Willis, the former executive director of the Virgin Islands Legislature, was sentenced to five years in prison for federal programs bribery and extortion under color of official right for accepting bribes from contractors.
- Alvin Williams, Jr., a former Virgin Islands senator, was sentenced to 52 months in prison in connection with his guilty plea to racketeering, that is, operating and participating in a criminal enterprise whose members and associates engaged in illegal activities including bribing a Virgin Islands public official, soliciting and receiving bribes

from numerous St. Thomas construction project developers, fraudulently soliciting and increasing staff members' salaries, and using the increase of funds for his personal use.

- Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) Captain Enrique Saldana, VIPD Sergeant George Green and civilian Luis Roldan were found guilty of the federal charges of conspiracy to commit extortion and extortion, and the Virgin Islands charges of conspiratorial extortion, extortion under color of official right, conflict of interest and solicitation and receipt of a bribe. Greene was sentenced to 36 months' imprisonment and Saldana was sentenced to 41 months' imprisonment. Prior to sentencing, Roldan was murdered.
- Former VIPD officers Enid Edwards and Francis Brooks were sentenced to 151 months in prison for operating a criminal enterprise ("RICO") as well as federal and territorial crimes related to extortion, bribery and conspiracy to distribute controlled substances. Former Virgin Islands Port Authority Officer Bill JohnBaptiste was convicted of false imprisonment and kidnapping and sentenced to five years in prison.

Mr. Sharpe also made civil rights a priority in the Virgin Islands, focusing on removing barriers to access for persons with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA"). As a result of an investigation initiated by the United States Attorney's Office, Caribbean Cinemas agreed to remedy potential violations of the ADA at its theaters by increasing accessible seating, making restrooms accessible and providing assisted-listening and closed-captioned systems for the hearing impaired.

With an emphasis on prevention, Mr. Sharpe helped foster a robust outreach program in the district. Projects included implementation of the United States Attorney's Office Community Outreach Initiative, a series of community meetings throughout the Virgin Islands where members of law enforcement and social services groups engage in an open forum to discuss how criminal activity affecting their community, especially gun violence, can best be addressed. Participants in the Community Outreach Initiative included the Virgin Islands Police Department, ATF, DEA, FBI, the United States Marshals Service, Crime Stoppers, Virgin Islands Housing Authority, My Brothers Workshop and Weed & Seed St. Thomas and St. Croix. In addition, Sharpe encouraged greater community involvement, including a volunteer program with the United States Attorney's Office and the Boys and Girls Club of the Virgin Islands.

The District of the Virgin Islands covers the Divisions of St. Thomas and St. John, and St. Croix. The United States Attorney's Office has 15 attorneys and is responsible for conducting all criminal and civil litigation in the district involving the United States government.

Feature Image: Ronald Sharpe. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)