

# United States Attorney's Office - Southern District of West Virginia

## News Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**April 29, 2010**

**In matters prosecuted by the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of West Virginia:**

### **FORMER STATE EMPLOYEE PLEADS GUILTY TO EXTORTION**

Gwen Conley, 52, of Chapmanville, West Virginia, pled guilty before United States District Thomas E. Johnston to interference with commerce by extortion, otherwise known as a Hobbs Act violation. While employed by the WV Department of Transportation in the Division of Highways as a transportation engineering technician, Conley inspected work on the Route 10 four lane road expansion project in Man, Logan County, West Virginia. Conley asked for and received money from a business responsible for temporary erosion control along the project. The owner of the business approached the West Virginia State Police and agreed to work as a cooperating individual. The owner delivered thousands of dollars to Conley in pre-recorded buy money that Conley was not entitled to receive in July and August 2008. The money was paid so that Conley would falsely claim the business was performing more erosion control services than they actually were, defrauding the state and federal government. The money was paid to Conley because of his public position with the Department of Transportation, and was received while he was on duty, qualifying as extortion "under color of official right." United States Attorney Chuck Miller stated, "The United States Attorney's Office takes very seriously allegations that public employees are taking money or benefits they are not entitled to receive. These cases will be vigorously pursued by this office." Conley, who is no longer employed by the WV Department of Transportation, is scheduled to be sentenced on August 26, 2010. He faces up to 20 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and has also agreed to pay restitution. The West Virginia State Police, Logan Detachment and the U. S. Department of Transportation, Office of Inspector General conducted the investigation. AUSA Erik Goes handled the prosecution.

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