

Florida attorney convicted of witness tampering and conspiracy to obstruct a grand jury

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A federal jury convicted former Monroe County, Fla., Attorney of conspiring to obstruct a federal grand jury and witness tampering, Assistant Attorney General Alice Fisher of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney R. Alexander Acosta Jr. of the Southern District of Florida announced today.

After deliberating for approximately two hours, the jury found James T. Hendrick, 59, of Key West, Fla., guilty on one count of conspiracy, one count of obstruction of justice, and two counts of witness tampering. Hendrick is currently the named partner in the law firm of Morgan and Hendrick located in Key West and formerly served as County Attorney for Monroe County. U.S. District Judge Shelby Highsmith ordered that the defendant be taken into custody immediately and set a sentencing date for May 4, 2007, in Miami.

The charges against Hendrick stem from a May 2004 indictment of former Monroe County Mayor John "Jack" London on charges of tax fraud and making false statements to the FBI. On May 19, 2005, Hendrick was added in a superseding indictment on charges of conspiring to obstruct and tamper with witnesses involved in the grand jury investigation of London. On July 13, 2005, London pleaded guilty to tax fraud and agreed to cooperate in the government's case against Hendrick. However, on Nov. 21, 2006, before trial could commence, London died of natural causes.

At trial, evidence showed that, in 1997, while serving as Monroe County Mayor, London received a \$29,000 bribe from Randall Hilliard, a political consultant who had been hired by a real estate developer to assist with obtaining building permits from the Monroe Board of County Commissioners. London used the money to satisfy an outstanding lien against a residential property he owned in Cork, Ireland. In 2002 and 2003, when confronted by agents with the FBI about his receipt of the \$29,000 bribe, London misled the investigators regarding the origin of the funds. Beginning in July 2003, and continuing into March 2004, Hendrick acted as a conduit between London and Hilliard to concoct a false story as to the true nature of the bribe payment. Hendrick did so knowing that the false information would be conveyed to a federal grand jury investigating the matter. Hendrick was the Monroe County Attorney at the time of the bribe and until September of 2003.

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