March 13, 2013

Charges Filed against eight men in Turnpike 'Pay to Play' scheme

HARRISBURG - Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen G. Kane announced today that criminal charges have been filed against a former State Senator, five former Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission officials and employees, and two businessmen who had multi-million dollar contracts with the Turnpike. The former state officials are accused of using ‘pay to play’ schemes for financial and political gain. Their criminal acts resulted in the misdirection, misuse, and theft of millions of dollars of public money, according to Kane.

Charges have been filed against former State Senator Robert Mellow, former Turnpike Commissioner Mitchell Rubin, former Turnpike Chief Executive Officer Joseph Brimmeier, former Turnpike Chief Operating Officer George Hatalowich, and former Turnpike employees Melvin Shelton and Raymond Zajicek. In addition, charges have been filed against Turnpike vendors Dennis Miller and Jeffrey Suzenski. They are charged with a variety of offenses, including conspiracy, commercial bribery, bid-rigging, theft, conflict of interest and corrupt organization violations.

"The grand jury found that these men were using the Turnpike to line their pockets and to influence elections," said Kane. "That is stealing from the public, pure and simple."

After a lengthy investigation, the 33rd Statewide Investigating Grand Jury found evidence that the Turnpike Commission has been corrupted by some of its very own officials and by some of the individuals who do business with it.

The grand jury heard evidence of secret gifts of cash, travel, and entertainment, and the payment of substantial political contributions to public officials and political organizations, by private Turnpike vendors and their consultants.

The charges show those who ‘pay to play’ have sought and been rewarded with multi-million dollar Turnpike contracts. As a result, the public has lost millions of dollars, according to Kane.

"The findings of the grand jury are very troubling to me," said Kane. "These were blatant actions. It was almost as though they had no fear of being caught. That kind of behavior has to stop."

"These presentments open the window to the operation of the Pennsylvania Turnpike commission and many of their associates in the private sector," said State Police Commissioner Frank Noonan. "It shows a culture of greed, corruption and political influence that is beyond imagination. The people of Pennsylvania deserve better."

In particular, the grand jury found substantial evidence that former State Senator Mellow, during his tenure as Democratic Floor Leader, directed that his Chief of Staff secure Turnpike contracts for key contributors and supporters. Mellow also told his Chief of Staff to order individuals at the Turnpike to provide political support and raise campaign funds on his behalf, according to the grand jury.

Kane thanked the Pennsylvania State Police for their assistance with the investigation.

The case will be prosecuted in Dauphin County by Senior Deputy Attorney General Laurel Brandstetter of the Attorney General’s Criminal Prosecution Section.

Below is a complete list of the defendants and the charges against them.

- Robert Mellow, 70, 110 Oak Hill Drive, Archbald, PA, is charged with two counts corrupt organizations, two counts of restricted activities, one count of commercial bribery, one count of unlawful bid-rigging, one count of restricted activities, one count of criminal conspiracy, and one count of failure to file expense account.

- Mitchell Rubin, 61, 1608 Green St., Philadelphia, PA, is charged with three counts of unlawful bid rigging, two counts corrupt organizations, two counts of restricted activities, one count commercial bribery, and one count of criminal conspiracy.
- Joseph Brimmeier, 64, 141 Renfer St., Pittsburgh, PA, is charged with two counts corrupt organizations, two counts of unlawful bid-rigging, two counts of restricted activities, one count of commercial bribery, one count of criminal attempt, and one count of criminal conspiracy.

- George Hatalowich, 47, 224 Tiverton Lane, Harrisburg, PA, is charged with seven counts of restricted activities, three counts of unlawful bid-rigging, two counts of corrupt organizations, one count of commercial bribery, one count of criminal attempt, and one count of criminal conspiracy.

- Dennis Miller, 51, 1626 Whitley Drive, Harrisburg, PA, is charged with one count of unlawful bid-rigging, one count of theft by unlawful taking, one count of theft by deception, one count of restricted activities, and one count of criminal conspiracy.

- Jeffrey Suzenski, 63, 2193 Saint Peters Road, Pottstown, PA, is charged with one count of restricted activities.

- Melvin Shelton, 81, 6000 West Oxford St., Philadelphia, PA, is charged with two counts of theft by unlawful taking, two counts of theft by deception, two counts of misapplication of entrusted property and property of government or financial institutions, one count of unauthorized use of automobiles and other vehicles, one count of perjury, one count of false swearing.

- Raymond Zajicek, 67, 731 Hidden Lake Drive, Tarpon Springs, FL, is charged with two counts theft by unlawful taking, two counts theft by deception, two counts of misapplication of entrusted property and property of government or financial institutions, one count of unauthorized use of automobiles and other vehicles, and one count of simple assault.

(EDITORS' NOTE: Click here for a copy of the Turnpike Grand Jury Presentment. Click here for the Criminal Complaints. Click here to read Attorney General Kathleen G. Kane's remarks)

(A person charged with a crime is presumed innocent until proven guilty.)

# # #