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**TWO WEST VIRGINIA MEN SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR COUNTERFEIT MONEY SCHEME**

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Two West Virginia men were sentenced yesterday in federal court by United States District Judge Thomas E. Johnston for their roles in a counterfeiting scheme. Roger L. Atkinson II, 32, of Ripley, West Virginia, was sentenced to eight months in prison for his role in the conspiracy. In February, a jury sitting in Charleston found that Atkinson passed counterfeit money and conspired to possess and manufacture counterfeit money. Lawrence "BJ" Holbrook, 36, of Spencer, was sentenced to four months in prison. Holbrook pleaded guilty in January to his role in the conspiracy.

Evidence at Atkinson's trial in February revealed that while at the Spencer Livestock Market in Roane County, he asked an unsuspecting friend for change for a counterfeit fifty-dollar bill. When that person tried to spend the fifty-dollar bill several days later at a local convenience store, the clerk rejected it as counterfeit. Further evidence at trial showed that Atkinson was involved in a broader counterfeiting scheme that spread fake bills through Spencer and elsewhere partly in an effort to support his drug habit. On February 17, 2009, Holbrook gave an associate four counterfeit \$10 bills to buy illegal prescription drugs. The jury returned guilty verdicts on two counts of an indictment finding that Atkinson conspired with Holbrook to manufacture and pass counterfeit money and that Atkinson did in fact pass counterfeit money.

U.S. Attorney Booth Goodwin said, "Counterfeiting strikes at the heart of the country's financial system. It does particular damage to small businesses, many of which simply cannot afford the losses they suffer when they are passed fake money. Small business owners like the victims in this case are the backbone of our economy, and my office will continue its commitment to aggressively prosecute criminals who defraud them."

This case is part of the ongoing efforts of the United States Attorney's Office to prosecute crimes against small businesses. In September 2010, U.S. Attorney Goodwin created and launched a comprehensive plan to protect small businesses and nonprofit agencies from fraud and abuse. Goodwin has redoubled efforts to identify, investigate and prosecute dishonest employees and other criminals who defraud or embezzle from small businesses.

The Crimes Against Small Business Initiative strives to protect businesses and nonprofit organizations by working in partnership with the business community, along with state and local law enforcement officials, to ensure that occurrences of fraud, embezzlement, scams and other crimes targeting small businesses are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

The United States Secret Service conducted the investigation. Assistant United States Attorneys Thomas Ryan and Steve Ruby handled the prosecution.

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