

# NEWS

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Immediate Release  
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## **ST. TAMMANY PARISH COUNCILMAN INDICTED BY FEDERAL GRAND JURY IN FEDERAL CORRUPTION OPERATION**

**BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA** - Jim Letten, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana, James Bernazzani, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Michael Nelson, Special Agent in Charge, Criminal Investigation Division, Internal Revenue Service, and Charles Haas, Special Agent in Charge, Department of Homeland Security, announced today that a Grand Jury sitting in the Eastern District of Louisiana returned a three (3) count indictment against **JOSEPH ANTHONY IMPASTATO**, a St. Tammany Parish Councilman. The indictment charges in Count 1 that **IMPASTATO** engaged in a conspiracy to

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interfere with commerce by extortion, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1951(a) (commonly known as the Hobbs Act). Count 2 charges **IMPASTATO** with interfering with commerce by extortion, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1951(a).

Count 3 charges **IMPASTATO** with conducting and attempting to conduct money laundering, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1956(a)(1)(B)(I). If convicted of Counts 1 and 2, the defendant faces a maximum penalty of twenty years (20) imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000 on each count. If convicted of Count 3, the defendant faces a maximum penalty of twenty (20) years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$500,000.

The indictment charges that **IMPASTATO** used his official position as a councilman to obtain inside information about the debris removal contract resulting from Hurricane Katrina, and further charges that the defendant used his official position to influence Omni Pinnacle, a prime contractor of St. Tammany Parish, to enter into a contract with the victim, Pontchartrain Chipping Yard. **IMPASTATO**, who is councilman for the owners of Pontchartrain Chipping Yard, allegedly pressured the owners to pay him 50% of the funds Pontchartrain received from Omni Pinnacle.

The indictment further alleges that when the victims were hesitant to accede to **IMPASTATO'S** demands, he used fear of economic harm, including inducing the owners believe to that he was making Omni Pinnacle withhold monies due them for prior debris removal.

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The indictment further alleges that **IMPASTATO** influenced and directed Pontchartrain Chipping Yard to make payments to **IMPASTATO** through another individual, when in reality, the money was intended for **IMPASTATO**.

United States Attorney Jim Letten said:

“Today’s indictment, which is the first major federal indictment charging a public official with crimes of public corruption in the wake of and in an effort to exploit the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, is a clear and unambiguous signal of federal law enforcement’s commitment to seek out, punish and deter corrupt and self serving conduct by public officials who use their positions to unjustly enrich themselves at the expense of the citizens they serve. Public corruption has cost the people of Louisiana dearly by denying them the honest services and the protection from economic and physical harm which all citizens deserve. In an effort to build a fair and friendly landscape for free enterprise, safety and quality of life, we will relentlessly and ever more aggressively target anyone who threatens to harm the prospects of our State’s recovery through corrupt practices.”

Special Agent-In-Charge Jim Bernazzani said:

“The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, of which the FBI is a member, will continue its vigilance to identify those public officials who would use the misfortune of others for their personal gain. The Internal Revenue Service and the Office of Inspector General, Department of Homeland Security provided invaluable assistance with this investigation .”

U. S. Attorney Letten reminds the press and public that an indictment is a formal accusation and that the defendant must therefore be presumed innocent until adjudicated guilty based upon proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Carter K.D. Guice, Jr., Peter M. Thomson and Dorothy M. Taylor.

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