

Connie S. Wilkinson, 54, of Tucson, Ariz., was sentenced here Monday by U.S. District Judge David C. Bury to 27 months in federal prison, and ordered to pay restitution of \$365,816 to the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System. Wilkinson pleaded guilty on October 2, 2008 to Theft of Public Money, Wire Fraud and Mail Fraud.

Wilkinson was the Clinical Director of Education and Training at Southern Arizona Veteran's Affairs Health Care System (VA) in Tucson, Arizona, between 1999 and 2006, and was issued a government credit card to pay for legitimate expenses in connection with her position. Through various schemes, Wilkinson stole \$365,816 in government funds from the VA. In her official capacity, Wilkinson requested payments from Southwest Health Professional Services (SHPS) for training services conducted by the VA, and instructed SHPS to make the checks directly payable to her, or in the name of a fictitious business she controlled, ultimately obtaining \$61,769.22 in checks which she deposited in her fictitious business account. Wilkinson also collected \$11,917.13 in checks payable to the VA from participants in VA training seminars, and endorsed and deposited these checks into the fictitious business checking account she controlled.

Wilkinson also used her government credit card to make internet purchases of \$47,750 in Target and Amazon gift cards which she used for personal purchases such as jewelry, clothing, toys, electronics and home goods. Finally, she used her VA credit card to charge the VA for \$244,380 in fictitious goods and services, payable to the fictitious business account controlled by defendant. Wilkinson then spent the money on apparel, jewelry, personal housing, home improvements and her children's educational expenses.

Wilkinson resigned from the VA in April 2006. She has paid \$40,230 towards restitution, and Judge Bury has ordered her to pay the remaining \$325,585 upon her release from prison.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the FBI and the Veterans Administration Office of Inspector General. The prosecution was handled by Cynthia R. Wood, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson.

TVNL Comment: Supporting the troops!

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