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**FORMER NASA EMPLOYEE PLEADS GUILTY TO MAKING FALSE STATEMENTS
CONCERNING HIS INTERACTIONS WITH CONTRACTORS**

Greenbelt, Maryland –Nathaniel Wright, age 55, of Silver Spring, Maryland, pleaded guilty today to making false statements in connection with an investigation into his interactions with contractors.

The guilty plea was announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein; Assistant Attorney General Leslie R. Caldwell of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division; and Inspector General Paul K. Martin, NASA Office of Inspector General.

According to the plea agreement, Wright worked as a NASA employee at Goddard Space Flight Center. In late 2009 and early 2010, while still employed full-time at NASA, Wright also worked as a contract employee for a friend’s small business that performed work for several government agencies. Wright assisted the small business in the preparation and submission of bids to other government agencies.

According to admissions made in connection with his plea agreement, from 2009 through 2012, Wright’s official duties at NASA included significant responsibilities with respect to three contracts, including an \$800 million contract, a \$450 million contract and a \$1.2 billion contract.

Wright admitted that, while working in his official capacity with NASA, he provided his resume to one of the contractors and said that he was looking for a position with their company. Wright suggested that he would wait to consider the contractor’s proposals until a position had been considered. Wright also admitted that he pressed a contractor to use his friend’s business to perform work on a specific task order, even though that businesses had no experience in the area.

Wright further admitted that he pressed additional contractors on a separate contract to direct work to his friend’s business. At a meeting in October 2012, Wright also instructed a contractor to include his friend’s business in a task order proposal and suggested that they include a document to justify the business’s involvement, even though the business had no expertise in the type of work called for under the contract.

NASA’s Office of Inspector General (OIG) opened an investigation into Wright’s conduct. As part of the investigation, on Oct. 23, 2012, three NASA OIG agents interviewed Wright. According to his plea agreement, Wright made a number of false statements during the interview regarding the circumstances surrounding his provision of his resume to the contractor and his pressuring of contractors to use his friend’s company. Wright admitted that he knew that these statements were false when he made them.

Wright faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison for making false statements. U.S. District Judge Theodore D. Chuang has scheduled sentencing for January 25, 2017 at 9:30 a.m.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein thanked NASA OIG for its work in the investigation. Mr. Rosenstein praised Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas M. Sullivan, Trial Attorney Victor R. Salgado of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section (PIN), who are prosecuting the case. Chief Kevin Driscoll of the Criminal Division's Asset Forfeiture Money Laundering Section Policy Unit previously handled the case for the Public Integrity Section.