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Used her position to steal nearly $40K

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Attorney General Ethel Branch announced July 24, that Deane Katherine Johnson, the former office maintenance specialist for the Oak Springs Chapter has pled guilty to a charge of Theft from a Tribal Organization, a federal felony offense.

In the plea agreement, Johnson admitted that in her position with the Oak Springs Chapter she knowingly and willfully took approximately $39,251.23 of funds belonging to the Chapter for her own use and the use of others.

“For too long, Chapter Officials and Employees have taken advantage of their positions to enrich themselves and their families at the expense of the Navajo Nation,” Branch said. “Navajo DOJ will not turn a blind eye to abuse by tribal officials. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to protect the Nation’s limited financial resources and ensure those who take advantage of their positions receive the punishment they deserve.”

An audit conducted by the Navajo Nation Office of the Auditor General led to the investigation that resulted in this guilty plea. The Auditor General, with the assistance of the Navajo Office of the Prosecutor, completed the investigation.

The tribal investigation was turned over to the United States Attorney for the District of Arizona and the Flagstaff Federal Bureau of Investigation for prosecution in federal court.

Johnson's plea agreement will require her to repay the Navajo Nation for the full amount of loss, up to $39,251.23. In exchange for pleading guilty and waiving her appeal rights, the Federal Government will recommend a two or three level reduction under the Federal Sentencing Guidelines.

However, the Sentencing Guidelines are only advisory, and the Court is free to exercise its discretion to impose any reasonable sentence up to the maximum statutory sentence of five years imprisonment.

The plea agreement is the defendant's admission of guilt and the final sentence will be imposed by the Judge at a sentencing hearing on Aug. 14. The plea agreement does not bar the Navajo Nation Department of Justice from pursuing its own charges against Johnson.