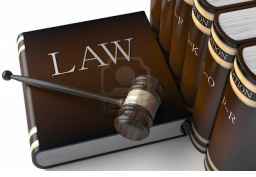


Holmen Postal Worker Pleads Guilty

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(AP) A former Coulee Region postal worker has pleaded guilty in federal court to stealing 9,000 pieces of mail. Fifty-year-old Robert Ernstes, of Melrose, told a federal judge in Madison Thursday that he took the mail because "times were tough, money was tight and bills were piling up." Ernstes worked at the downtown La Crosse post office. A Holmen man who mailed cards containing \$2 bills to his grandchildren alerted authorities after the cards were delivered, but had been opened and were missing the bills. Ernstes admitted in court to taking money from envelopes he opened. The stolen mail has been held as evidence, but will now be released for delivery.