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AMENDMENTS TO FEDERAL RULES OF EVIDENCE

COMMUNICATION

FROM

THE CHIEF JUSTICE, THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

TRANSMITTING

AMENDMENTS TO THE FEDERAL RULES OF EVIDENCE THAT HAVE BEEN ADOPTED BY THE COURT, PURSUANT TO 28 U.S.C. 2072

MARCH 27, 2003.—Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary and ordered to be printed

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SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, DC, March 27, 2003.

Hon. J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: I have the honor to submit to the Congress the amendments to the Federal Rules of Evidence that have been adopted by the Supreme Court of the United States pursuant to Section 2072 of Title 28, United States Code.

Accompanying this rule are excerpts from the report of the Judicial Conference of the United States containing the Committee Note submitted to the Court for its consideration pursuant to Section 331 of Title 28, United States Code.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM H. REHNQUIST,
Chief Justice.

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

ORDERED:

1. That the Federal Rules of Evidence be, and they hereby are, amended by including therein the amendments to Evidence Rule 608(b).

[See infra., pp. __ __ __.]

2. That the foregoing amendments to the Federal Rules of Evidence shall take effect on December 1, 2003, and shall govern in all proceedings thereafter commenced and, insofar as just and practicable, all proceedings then pending.

3. That THE CHIEF JUSTICE be, and hereby is, authorized to transmit to the Congress the foregoing amendments to the Federal Rules of Evidence in accordance with the provisions of Section 2072 of Title 28, United States Code.

AMENDMENTS TO THE FEDERAL RULES OF EVIDENCE

Rule 608. Evidence of Character and Conduct of Witness

(a) Opinion and reputation evidence of character. — The credibility of a witness may be attacked or supported by evidence in the form of opinion or reputation, but subject to these limitations: (1) the evidence may refer only to character for truthfulness or untruthfulness, and (2) evidence of truthful character is admissible only after the character of the witness for truthfulness has been attacked by opinion or reputation evidence or otherwise.

(b) Specific instances of conduct. — Specific instances of the conduct of a witness, for the purpose of attacking or supporting the witness' character for truthfulness, other than conviction of crime as provided in rule 609, may not be proved by extrinsic evidence. They may, however, in the discretion of the court, if probative of truthfulness or untruthfulness, be inquired into on cross-examination of the witness (1) concerning the witness' character for

truthfulness or untruthfulness, or (2) concerning the character for truthfulness or untruthfulness of another witness as to which character the witness being cross-examined has testified.

The giving of testimony, whether by an accused or by any other witness, does not operate as a waiver of the accused's or the witness' privilege against self-incrimination when examined with respect to matters that relate only to character for truthfulness.

LEONIDAS RALPH MECHAM
Director

CLARENCE A. LEE, JR.
Associate Director

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE
UNITED STATES COURTS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20544

December 11, 2002

MEMORANDUM TO THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE UNITED STATES AND THE ASSOCIATE JUSTICES OF THE SUPREME COURT

By direction of the Judicial Conference of the United States, pursuant to the authority conferred by 28 U.S.C. § 331, I have the honor to transmit herewith for consideration of the Court proposed amendments to Rule 608(b) of the Federal Rules of Evidence. The Judicial Conference recommends that these amendments be approved by the Court and transmitted to the Congress pursuant to law.

For your assistance in considering these proposed amendments, I am transmitting an excerpt from the Report of the Committee on Rules of Practice and Procedure to the Judicial Conference and the Report of the Advisory Committee on the Federal Rules of Evidence.

Leonidas Ralph Mecham
Secretary

Attachments

EXCERPT FROM THE
REPORT OF THE JUDICIAL CONFERENCE
COMMITTEE ON RULES OF PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE

TO THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE UNITED STATES AND MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES:

* * * * *

FEDERAL RULES OF EVIDENCE

Rules Recommended for Approval and Transmission

The Advisory Committee on Evidence Rules submitted a proposed amendment to Rule 608(b) with a recommendation that it be approved and transmitted to the Judicial Conference. The amendment was circulated to the bench and bar for comment in August 2001. The scheduled January 2002 public hearing was canceled because no one requested to testify.

The proposed amendment to Rule 608(b) (Specific instances of conduct) clarifies the prohibition on using extrinsic evidence, as was originally intended by the rule, to apply only in cases in which the proponent's sole reason for proffering the evidence is to attack or support the witness's "character for truthfulness," rather than to permit a potentially broader literal reading of the reference to the witness's "credibility" under the existing rule. Notwithstanding the original intent of the drafters of Rule 608(b) and the decision in *United States v. Abel*, 469 U.S. 45 (1984), holding that the Rule 608(b) extrinsic evidence prohibition does not apply when it is offered for a purpose other than proving the witness's character for veracity, a number of cases have construed "credibility" more broadly and prohibited extrinsic evidence proffered to prove non-character forms of impeachment. By expressly limiting the application of the rule to proof of a witness's character for truthfulness as originally intended, the amendment leaves open the admissibility of extrinsic evidence offered for other grounds of impeachment (e.g., prior inconsistent statement, bias, and mental capacity), also as originally intended. The admissibility of

extrinsic evidence offered to impeach a witness on grounds other than character continues to be governed by Rules 402 and 403.

The Committee concurred with the advisory committee's recommendations. An excerpt from the advisory committee report describes the proposed amendments and is set out in Appendix C.

> **Recommendation**: That the Judicial Conference approve the proposed amendments to Evidence Rule 608(b) and transmit these changes to the Supreme Court for its consideration with a recommendation that they be adopted by the Court and transmitted to Congress in accordance with the law.

* * * * *

COMMITTEE ON RULES OF PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE
OF THE
JUDICIAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20544

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MILTON I. SHADUR
EVIDENCE RULES

TO: **Honorable Anthony J. Scirica, Chair Standing Committee on Rules of Practice and Procedure**

FROM: **Honorable Milton I. Shadur, Chair Advisory Committee on Evidence Rules**

DATE: **May 1, 2002 (Revised to account for action taken by Standing Committee at its June 10-11 meeting)**

RE: **Report of the Advisory Committee on Evidence Rules**

I. Introduction

The Advisory Committee on Evidence Rules met on April 19, 2002, in Washington, D.C. At the meeting the Committee approved a proposed amendment to Evidence Rule 608(b), with the unanimous recommendation that the Standing Committee approve the proposed amendment and forward it to the Judicial Conference. Part II of this Report summarizes the discussion of this proposed amendment. An attachment to this Report includes the text, Committee Note, GAP report, and summary of public comment for the proposed amendment to Rule 608(b).

* * * * *

II. Action Items

A. Recommendation To Forward the Proposed Amendment to Evidence Rule 608(b) to the Judicial Conference

At its June 2001 meeting the Standing Committee approved the publication of a proposed amendment to Evidence Rule 608(b). The Committee received 12 written comments from the public on this proposed amendment. Public hearings were cancelled because nobody expressed an interest in testifying. A complete discussion of the Committee's consideration of the public comments respecting Rule 608(b) can be found in the draft minutes attached to this Report. The following discussion briefly summarizes the proposed amendment to Rule 608(b).

The proposed amendment to Evidence Rule 608(b) is intended to bring the text of the Rule into line with the original intent of the drafters. The Rule was intended to prohibit the admission of extrinsic evidence when offered to attack or support a witness' character for truthfulness. Unfortunately the text of the Rule is phrased as prohibiting extrinsic evidence when offered to attack or support a witness' "credibility"– a less precise locution. The term "credibility" can be read to prohibit extrinsic evidence when offered for non-character forms of impeachment, such as to prove bias, contradiction or prior inconsistent statement. *United States v. Abel,* 469 U.S. 45 (1984) held that the Rule 608(b) extrinsic evidence prohibition does not apply when it is offered for a purpose other than proving the witness' character for veracity. But even though most case law is faithful to the drafters' original intent, a number of cases continue to misapply the Rule to preclude extrinsic evidence offered to impeach a witness on grounds other than character. *See, e.g., Becker v. ARCO*

Chem. Co., 207 F.3d 176 (3d Cir. 2000) (stating that evidence offered for contradiction is barred by Rule 608(b)); *United States v. Bussey*, 942 F.2d 1241 (8th Cir. 1991) (stating that the "plain language" of the Rule bars the use of extrinsic evidence to impeach a witness by way of contradiction); *United States v. Graham*, 856 F.2d 756 (6th Cir. 1988) (Rule 608(b) bars extrinsic evidence when offered to prove that the witness is biased).

The proposed amendment substitutes the term "character for truthfulness" for the overbroad term "credibility," thereby limiting the extrinsic evidence ban to cases in which the proponent's sole purpose is to impeach the witness' character for veracity. This change is consistent with the Court's construction of the Rule in *Abel*. The Committee Note to the proposed Rule clarifies that the admissibility of extrinsic evidence offered to impeach a witness on grounds other than character is governed by Rule 402 and Rule 403, not by Rule 608(b).

The public comments on the proposed amendment uniformly praised the Advisory Committee's deletion of the overbroad term "credibility" and agreed that the Rule should be limited to its original intent, which was to exclude extrinsic evidence only when it is offered to prove a witness' character for truthfulness, and to leave all other uses of extrinsic evidence to be regulated by Rules 402 and 403.

One public commentator noted that there are other places in the Evidence Rules where the term "credibility" is probably used to mean "character for truthfulness." He suggested that the Committee use the occasion of the proposed amendment to address other provisions in the Evidence Rules where the term "credibility" is arguably misused. The Committee considered this comment carefully. It unanimously determined that the proposed amendment should be

revised slightly to replace the term "credibility" with the term "character for truthfulness" in the last sentence of Rule 608(b). The Committee also revised the proposed Committee Note to refer to this slight change in the text and to explain that the change was made to provide uniform terminology throughout Rule 608(b).

The Evidence Rules Committee further considered whether the term "credibility" should be changed in other Evidence Rules. The Committee determined that the term need not be changed in Rule 608(a), because that Rule already limits impeachment to evidence pertinent to a witness' character for truthfulness. The Committee also determined that the use of the term "credibility" in Rules 609 and 610 has not created the same problems for courts and litigants as has the use of that term in Rule 608(b). The Committee found no reason to delay or withdraw the amendment to Rule 608(b) simply because the term "credibility" is used in other Evidence Rules.

Recommendation — The Evidence Rules Committee recommends that the proposed amendment to Evidence Rule 608(b), as modified following publication, be approved and forwarded to the Judicial Conference.

* * * * *

Attachment[]:

Proposed Amendment to Evidence Rule 608(b) and Committee Note (recommended for approval and forwarding to the Judicial Conference).

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PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE FEDERAL RULES OF EVIDENCE*

Rule 608. Evidence of Character and Conduct of Witness

1 **(a) Opinion and reputation evidence of character.** — The
2 credibility of a witness may be attacked or supported by
3 evidence in the form of opinion or reputation, but subject to
4 these limitations: (1) the evidence may refer only to character
5 for truthfulness or untruthfulness, and (2) evidence of truthful
6 character is admissible only after the character of the witness
7 for truthfulness has been attacked by opinion or reputation
8 evidence or otherwise.
9 **(b) Specific instances of conduct.** — Specific instances of
10 the conduct of a witness, for the purpose of attacking or
11 supporting the witness' ~~credibility~~ character for truthfulness,
12 other than conviction of crime as provided in rule 609, may
13 not be proved by extrinsic evidence. They may, however, in

* New material is underlined; matter to be omitted is lined through.

14 the discretion of the court, if probative of truthfulness or
15 untruthfulness, be inquired into on cross-examination of the
16 witness (1) concerning the witness' character for truthfulness
17 or untruthfulness, or (2) concerning the character for
18 truthfulness or untruthfulness of another witness as to which
19 character the witness being cross-examined has testified.

20 The giving of testimony, whether by an accused or by
21 any other witness, does not operate as a waiver of the
22 accused's or the witness' privilege against self-incrimination
23 when examined with respect to matters ~~which~~ that relate only
24 to ~~credibility~~ character for truthfulness.

COMMITTEE NOTE

The Rule has been amended to clarify that the absolute prohibition on extrinsic evidence applies only when the sole reason for proffering that evidence is to attack or support the witness' character for truthfulness. *See United States v. Abel,* 469 U.S. 45 (1984); *United States v. Fusco,* 748 F.2d 996 (5th Cir. 1984) (Rule 608(b) limits the use of evidence "designed to show that the witness has done things, unrelated to the suit being tried, that make him more or less believable per se"); Ohio R.Evid. 608(b). On occasion the Rule's use of the overbroad term "credibility" has been read "to bar

extrinsic evidence for bias, competency and contradiction impeachment since they too deal with credibility." American Bar Association Section of Litigation, *Emerging Problems Under the Federal Rules of Evidence* at 161 (3d ed. 1998). The amendment conforms the language of the Rule to its original intent, which was to impose an absolute bar on extrinsic evidence only if the sole purpose for offering the evidence was to prove the witness' character for veracity. *See* Advisory Committee Note to Rule 608(b) (stating that the Rule is "[i]n conformity with Rule 405, which forecloses use of evidence of specific incidents as proof in chief of character unless character is in issue in the case . . .").

By limiting the application of the Rule to proof of a witness' character for truthfulness, the amendment leaves the admissibility of extrinsic evidence offered for other grounds of impeachment (such as contradiction, prior inconsistent statement, bias and mental capacity) to Rules 402 and 403. *See, e.g., United States v. Winchenbach,* 197 F.3d 548 (1st Cir. 1999) (admissibility of a prior inconsistent statement offered for impeachment is governed by Rules 402 and 403, not Rule 608(b)); *United States v. Tarantino*, 846 F.2d 1384 (D.C. Cir. 1988) (admissibility of extrinsic evidence offered to contradict a witness is governed by Rules 402 and 403); *United States v. Lindemann,* 85 F.3d 1232 (7th Cir. 1996) (admissibility of extrinsic evidence of bias is governed by Rules 402 and 403).

It should be noted that the extrinsic evidence prohibition of Rule 608(b) bars any reference to the consequences that a witness might have suffered as a result of an alleged bad act. For example, Rule 608(b) prohibits counsel from mentioning that a witness was suspended or disciplined for the conduct that is the subject of impeachment, when that conduct is offered only to prove the character of the witness. *See United States v. Davis,* 183 F.3d 231, 257 n.12 (3d Cir. 1999) (emphasizing that in attacking the

defendant's character for truthfulness "the government cannot make reference to Davis's forty-four day suspension or that Internal Affairs found that he lied about" an incident because "[s]uch evidence would not only be hearsay to the extent it contains assertion of fact, it would be inadmissible extrinsic evidence under Rule 608(b)"). *See also* Stephen A. Saltzburg, *Impeaching the Witness: Prior Bad Acts and Extrinsic Evidence*, 7 Crim. Just. 28, 31 (Winter 1993) ("counsel should not be permitted to circumvent the no-extrinsic-evidence provision by tucking a third person's opinion about prior acts into a question asked of the witness who has denied the act.").

For purposes of consistency the term "credibility" has been replaced by the term "character for truthfulness" in the last sentence of subdivision (b). The term "credibility" is also used in subdivision (a). But the Committee found it unnecessary to substitute "character for truthfulness" for "credibility" in Rule 608(a), because subdivision (a)(1) already serves to limit impeachment to proof of such character.

Rules 609(a) and 610 also use the term "credibility" when the intent of those Rules is to regulate impeachment of a witness' character for truthfulness. No inference should be derived from the fact that the Committee proposed an amendment to Rule 608(b) but not to Rules 609 and 610.

Changes Made After Publication and Comments. The last sentence of Rule 608(b) was changed to substitute the term "character for truthfulness" for the existing term "credibility." This change was made in accordance with public comment suggesting that it would be helpful to provide uniform terminology throughout Rule 608(b). A stylistic change was also made to the last sentence of Rule 608(b).

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