

Beat: News

Former Federal Agent Guilty of Participating in Bribery Scheme

\$100,000 in Ill-Gotten Gains

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USPA NEWS - A former special agent with Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) was found guilty by a federal jury today of dozens of criminal charges for accepting cash payments and other benefits to help an organized crime-linked person, including taking official action designed to help two foreign nationals gain entry into the United States.

Felix Cisneros Jr., 48, of Murrieta, was found guilty of 30 felonies: one count of conspiracy to commit bribery of a public official, one count of bribery, 26 counts of money laundering and two counts of subscribing to a false tax return. After today's verdict was read, Cisneros was ordered immediately remanded into federal custody.

According to evidence presented at his five-day trial, over an 18-month period that started in September 2015, Cisneros accepted cash, checks, private jet travel, luxury hotel stays, meals and other items of value from a person identified in court documents as "Individual 1," who was associated with a criminal organization. Cisneros received approximately \$100,000 in checks and gifts from Individual 1 in 2015 and 2016.

Cisneros accepted the cash and other bribes while employed as a special agent with HSI, which is an agency within the United States Department of Homeland Security. In exchange for the bribes, Cisneros performed a series of official acts at the behest of Individual 1, including:

- Accessing a DHS database for information about a German national identified as W.R., and telling Individual 1 he removed a "hit" on W.R., "thus indicating derogatory information had been removed";
- Placing an alert in a law enforcement database for an address associated with an illegal marijuana grow operation so Cisneros could learn of law enforcement interest and warn Individual 1;
- Obtaining an official DHS letter signed by an HSI assistant special agent in charge to allow the parole of Individual 1's brother-in-law into the United States from Mexico, and later providing updates about the brother-in-law's asylum application; and
- Collecting information on an associate of Individual 1 whose home had been searched by law enforcement and later providing Individual 1 with information about the investigation.

Cisneros also underreported his total income on his federal income tax returns by at least \$20,000 for the year 2015 and at least \$73,404 for the year 2016.

United States District Judge R. Gary Klausner has scheduled an August 1 sentencing hearing. The conspiracy charge carries a statutory maximum sentence of five years in federal prison, the bribery count carries a sentence of up to 15 years, each money laundering charge carries a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment, and each tax count carries a statutory maximum sentence of three years in federal prison.

The FBI, IRS Criminal Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General investigated this matter.

Assistant United States Attorney Ruth C. Pinkel of the Public Corruption and Civil Rights Section and Assistant United States Attorneys Michael J. Morse and Juan M. Rodriguez of the General Crimes Section are prosecuting this case.

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Wendy writes for the United States Press Agency and is a former columnist with the Fulton County Expositor, Wauseon, Ohio.

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