

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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## ***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA***

***San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney  
Karen P. Hewitt***

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***For Immediate Release***

### ***Two Former Border Patrol Agents Extradited From Mexico To Face Smuggling Charges***

**NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY** - March 13, 2009

San Diego, CA - United States Attorney Karen P. Hewitt announced today that two former United States Border Patrol (BP) agents, Raul Villarreal and Fidel Villarreal, as well as Claudia Gonzalez and Armando Garcia, were arraigned today in federal court in San Diego before Magistrate Judge Leo S. Papas on an 18-count indictment. All defendants are charged with conspiracy to bring in illegal aliens for financial gain, multiple counts of bringing in illegal aliens for financial gain, conspiracy to launder money, conspiracy to tamper with a witness, witness tampering, and criminal forfeiture. The Villarreals are charged with receiving bribes by public officials; Armando Garcia and Claudia Gonzalez are also charged with bribery of a public official.

On October 18, 2008, former BP agents Raul and Fidel Villarreal were arrested, along with Armando Garcia and Claudia Gonzalez, in Tijuana, Mexico, pursuant to provisional arrest warrants based on felony charges pending in United States District Court for the Southern District of California. They were then transferred to Mexico City for extradition proceedings and returned to the United States on March 12, 2009. The indictment was handed up by a federal grand jury sitting in San Diego in April 2008 and unsealed on

October 20, 2008.

According to the indictment, the defendants ran an alien smuggling organization to bring illegal aliens into the United States from Mexico for money. Claudia Gonzalez and Armando Garcia allegedly bribed BP agents Raul Villarreal and Fidel Villarreal not to perform their duties of enforcing the immigration laws of the United States. The indictment alleges that on multiple occasions in 2005 and 2006, Armando Garcia led groups of aliens into the United States by walking them across the border at locations other than the ports of entry. Raul Villarreal and Fidel Villarreal then picked up the aliens using their official Border Patrol vehicles and released the aliens in furtherance of their illegal entry into the United States. The Villarreals are also charged with conspiring with Claudia Gonzalez and Armando Garcia to launder money and tamper with witnesses.

United States Attorney Hewitt said, "Fighting public corruption at all levels is one of our most important priorities. Individuals who violate the law and the public's trust will find no safe haven by fleeing to another country. We appreciate very much the assistance of the Government of Mexico to extradite these individuals charged with violating the laws of the United States."

"This arrest is a reminder for criminals to think twice before fleeing the United States to evade prosecution and punishment for crimes they have committed here," said Miguel Unzueta, Special Agent in Charge for the ICE Office of Investigations in San Diego. "ICE works closely with law enforcement agencies in Mexico and around the world to ensure our borders will not be barriers to bringing serious criminals to justice."

Richard L. Skinner, Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Office of Inspector General (OIG) said, "The men and women of the Border Patrol continue to enjoy an outstanding and professional reputation as our country's first line of defense of our international borders. Their work increases our country's border security and national security. The OIG will continue its commitment to work with our law

enforcement partners to identify and aggressively investigate all allegations of corruption to protect our borders and the integrity of DHS personnel, programs, and operations.”

The defendants are next scheduled to be in court on March 17, 2009 at 9:30 a.m., before Magistrate Judge Papas for a detention hearing.

**DEFENDANTS**                      **Case Number: 08CR1332-JAH**

Raul Villarreal	Age: 39
Fidel Villarreal	Age: 41
Armando Garcia	Age: 40
Claudia Gonzalez	Age: 32

**SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

Conspiracy to Bring in Illegal Aliens for Financial Gain — Title 18, United States Code, 371  
Maximum penalties: 5 years’ imprisonment and \$250,000 fine

Bringing in illegal aliens for financial gain – Title 8, United States Code, Sections 1324(a)(2)(B)(ii)  
Maximum penalties: 10 years’ imprisonment and \$250,000 fine

Bribery – Title 18, United States Code, Sections 201(b)(2)(A) and (C)  
Maximum penalties: 15 years’ imprisonment and greater of \$250,000 fine or three times the amount of the bribe

Conspiracy To Launder Money – Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1956(a)(2)(A) and (h)  
Maximum penalties: 20 years’ imprisonment and greater of \$500,000 fine or twice the value of the funds

Conspiracy To Tamper with a Witness – Title 18, United States Code, Section 1512(k)  
Maximum penalties: 10 years’ imprisonment and \$250,000 fine

Witness Tampering – Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1512(a)(3)(C)  
Maximum penalties: 10 years’ imprisonment and \$250,000 fine

Criminal Forfeiture – Title 18, United States Code, Section 982(a)(1)  
Maximum penalties: Forfeiture of proceeds

**AGENCIES**

Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General  
ICE Office of Professional Responsibility  
U.S. Border Patrol

**An indictment itself is not evidence that the defendants committed the crimes charged. The defendants are presumed innocent until the Government meets its burden in court of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.**