Beat: News

Two Puerto Rico Mayors Charged with Accepting Bribes

In exchange for municipal contracts

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USPA NEWS - A federal grand jury in San Juan, Puerto Rico returned an indictment on May 4th charging Javier García-Pérez, the Mayor of Aguas Buenas, with conspiracy, soliciting bribes, and extortion. In a separate indictment, Reinaldo Vargas-Rodriguez, the Mayor of Humacao was also charged with conspiracy, soliciting bribes, and extortion.

According to court documents, Javier García-Pérez, 46, of Aguas Buenas, was involved in a bribery conspiracy in which, from 2017 through 2021, he received and accepted cash payments from two businessmen in exchange for awarding municipal contracts for waste disposal services, asphalt and paving services, and debris removal and paying outstanding invoices on the contracts. The indictment alleges that García-Pérez received at least $32,000 in cash payments from August 2020 through September 2021 from the two businessmen.

A second indictment returned yesterday alleges that Reinaldo Vargas-Rodriguez, 48, of Humacao, was involved in a bribery conspiracy in which, from January to July 2021, he received and accepted cash payments from two businessmen in exchange for awarding municipal contracts for waste disposal and asphalt and paving services, and for paying outstanding invoices on the contracts. The indictment alleges that Vargas-Rodriguez received at least $15,000 in cash payments from March 18, 2021 through April 15, 2021 from the two businessmen.

If convicted of all counts, García-Pérez and Vargas-Rodriguez face a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite, Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney W. Stephen Muldrow for the District of Puerto Rico, and Assistant Director Luis M. Quesada of the FBI's Criminal Investigative Division made the announcement.

The investigation was conducted by the FBI's San Juan Field Office.

The cases are being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Nicholas W. Cannon of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Scott H. Anderson for the District of Puerto Rico.

The cases are part of the Justice Department's ongoing efforts to combat public corruption by municipal officials in Puerto Rico. In addition to the above matters, the Public Integrity Section and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico have recently obtained convictions against other former public officials and contractors in the District of Puerto Rico for soliciting and accepting bribes related to municipal contracts. See United States v. Luis Arroyo-Chiques, 21-485 (SCC); United States v. Eduardo Cintron-Suarez, 22-151 (SCC); United States v. Felix Delgado-Montalvo, 21-463 (RAM); United States v. Oscar Santamaria-Torres, 21-464 (RAM); United States v. Raymond Rodriguez, 21-465 (RAM).

Additionally, the department recently obtained indictments charging several former officials and contractors with bribery related to municipal contracts, and those cases are still pending. See United States v. Mario Villegas-Vargas, 21-468 (FAB); United States v. Angel Perez-Otero, 21-474 (ADC); and United States v. Radames Benitez-Cardona, 21-475 (PAD).

An indictment is merely an allegation, and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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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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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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