



Department of Justice

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FORMER CBP OFFICER INDICTED FOR ACCEPTING BRIBES IN SCHEME THAT BROKERED TRAVEL PERMITS

(LAREDO, Texas) – An indictment charging a former Customs and Border Protection Officer (CBP) and a Laredo man for their involvement in a scheme that falsely produced and brokered official travel documents has been unsealed, United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle announced today.

A five-count indictment returned under seal Tuesday, May 20, 2008, charging former CBP Officer Ramiro Villarreal Jr., 27, and Juan Esteban Velasquez, 52, both of Laredo, was unsealed today following [the arrest of Velasquez and his appearance before a U.S. Magistrate Judge in Laredo](#). The court set bail at \$100,000. Villarreal was arrested May 1, 2008, and has been released on a \$100,000 bond pending trial in this case. [His arraignment is set for Friday, May 30, 2008](#).

The indictment accuses both men of conspiring to fraudulently produce Department of Homeland Security CBP Arrival-Departure Records, also known as a "Form I-94" from Feb. 1, 2007, until Villarreal's arrest May 1, 2008. Form I-94 permits are utilized by foreign nationals in conjunction with an entry document, such as a passport or a DSP-150 B1/B2 visa (commonly known as a border crossing card or laser visa), to travel beyond border immigration checkpoints into the interior of the United States. When entering by land through an international bridge, an applicant for a Form I-94 permit applies in person and presents his/her passport or border crossing card. A CBP officer then reviews the travel permit application and inspects the applicant for admission. If granted the permit, the CBP officer will issue it under the officer's stamp. CBP uses Form I-94 to document a non-immigrant alien's legal admission into the United States and the period of authorized stay in the country.

As part of the conspiracy to fraudulently produce, sell and transfer Forms I-94, the indictment alleges that in exchange for cash from Velasquez and others, Villarreal created and issued completed Forms I-94 while working his assigned duties as a CBP officer at one of the land ports

of entry in Laredo, Texas, in the names of non-immigrant aliens who did not present themselves in person for inspection nor submit their application for the permit in person.

In addition to the conspiracy charge, which carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine, Villarreal is also charged with two counts of falsely making documents prescribed by law for entry into and authorized stay in the United States on April 26 and April 30, 2008. Each count carries a maximum 10 years imprisonment and a similar fine. Villarreal and Velasquez are each charged with one count of bribery of a public official. Villarreal is charged with corruptly demanding, seeking, receiving, accepting and agreeing to accept U.S. currency from Velasquez to perform an official act and perpetrate a fraud upon the United States. Velasquez is accused of corruptly giving, offering and promising U.S. currency to Villarreal to influence him to perform an official act in violation of his official duty. If convicted of bribery, both men face a maximum of 15 years imprisonment and three times the amount of the bribe involved in the transaction, and may be disqualified from holding any office of honor, trust or profit under the United States.

The investigation leading to the charges was conducted by Special Agents from the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General, with the assistance of the Laredo office of Customs and Border Protection. Assistant United States Attorney Diana Song is prosecuting the case.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. A defendant is presumed innocent unless convicted through due process of law.