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News Releases



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5 indicted in large-scale immigration fraud scheme orchestrated by attorney who paid bribes to DHS personnel Employees allegedly took payments of up to \$10,000

LOS ANGELES — A special agent with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and a former immigration officer surrendered to federal authorities Wednesday morning after a grand jury indicted them and three other individuals who allegedly participated in a long-running immigration fraud scheme that was fueled by official corruption.

The conspiracy was allegedly orchestrated by a Los Angeles attorney who paid bribes as high as \$10,000 to officials with several agencies in DHS to help secure immigration benefits for aliens he represented.

An 18-count superseding indictment returned Tuesday afternoon outlines a wide-ranging bribery scheme in which attorney Kwang Man "John" Lee — who was previously charged in a criminal complaint and is not named in the indictment issued Tuesday — used illegal tactics to procure immigration benefits for clients. Lee allegedly paid bribes to public officials to secure admission stamps and lawful permanent residency status for aliens who paid fees ranging from a few hundred dollars to more than \$50,000. Lee paid bribes to government officials, with payments ranging from \$50 to as much as \$10,000 given to an officer with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Authorities have identified several dozen aliens who improperly received immigrations benefits, but that number is growing as the investigation continues.

Those indicted in the case are:

- USCIS Supervisory Officer Jesus Figueroa, 66, of Tujunga;
- former USCIS Officer Paul Lovingood, 71, of Newhall, who surrendered to federal authorities Wednesday morning;
- James Dominguez, a special agent with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), 46, of Ventura, who surrendered to federal authorities Wednesday morning;
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer Michael Anders, 53, of Torrance; and
- Mirei Hofmann, 38, of Los Angeles, a native of Japan, who allegedly paid Lee tens of thousands of dollars to secure a permanent resident card.

Figueroa and Hofmann were named in an earlier indictment returned by the grand jury about a month ago. Anders and Lee, a 47-year-old resident of Los Angeles, were named in a criminal complaint filed about a month ago. All four were previously arrested and released on bond. They will be summoned into court for arraignments on the new indictment in the coming weeks.

Dominguez and Lovingood were charged for the first time in Tuesday's indictment, and both are expected to be arraigned Wednesday afternoon in U.S. District Court.

The indictment alleges two conspiracies involving bribery and fraud against the United States (Figueroa, Dominguez and Lovingood are charged in one conspiracy; Anders is charged in the second). The indictment also alleges seven counts of bribery, two counts of making false statements, three counts of misuse of government seals (USCIS approval stamps), three counts of false stamps, and Hofmann is charged alone in one count of immigration fraud.

"The allegations in this case concern federal law enforcement officers selling their services and betraying their oaths to our nation so they could profit from a clandestine immigration fraud ring that allowed scores of aliens to improperly enter and reside in the United States," said U.S. Attorney André Birotte Jr., Central District of California. "Immigration fraud subverts the orderly process of citizenship and compromises the security of the homeland. We will do everything possible to protect our system of government when it is threatened by public officials who are more concerned with private profit than upholding the law."

The four current and former government officials named in Tuesday's indictment allegedly conducted a number of official acts to help Lee's clients obtain immigration benefits. For example, the indictment specifically alleges that Figueroa, Dominguez and Lovingood added documents to, and removed documents from, immigration files (A-files) related to Lee's clients. In exchange for their official acts, Lee allegedly paid the officials with cash and expensive gifts — including at least three Thailand vacations for Dominguez, computers and television sets for Lovingood, and thousands of dollars in cash for Figueroa.

"Guarding against illegal or unethical behavior by those in positions of public trust is not an option — it is an obligation we have to the people we serve," said Joe Jeronimo, special agent in charge of ICE's Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR), West Region. "We will move aggressively to target those who corrupt the integrity of our nation's immigration system, particularly when the actions involve individuals sworn to safeguard that process."

Lee, a former officer with an agency previously known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service, became an attorney in 1997 and maintains offices in the Mid-Wilshire district of Los Angeles. According to an affidavit in support of a criminal complaint previously filed in this case, "The investigation has revealed that Lee is the middleman in a corruption ring that solicits bribes from aliens in exchange for immigration benefits, ranging from fraudulent admission stamps to citizenship. Lee appears to be the point-of-contact between government officials, whom Lee pays to procure these immigration benefits, and known and unknown co-conspirators, who refer aliens to Lee. The investigation has also revealed that Lee uses his position as a licensed attorney to facilitate the bribery conspiracy by, among other things, assisting alien bribe payers in submitting false and fraudulent immigration

petitions to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services."

The conspiracy counts carry a statutory maximum penalty of five years in federal prison, and the bribery counts carry a statutory maximum penalty of 15 years in prison. If convicted of all counts in which they are charged, Figueroa would face a statutory maximum penalty of 80 years in federal prison; Anders would face a statutory maximum sentence of 65 years in federal prison; Lovingood would face a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in federal prison; Dominguez would face a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison; and Hofmann would face a statutory maximum sentence of 10 years in federal prison.

The superseding indictment returned Tuesday is the result of an ongoing investigation being conducted by ICE OPR and ICE HSI, which are receiving substantial assistance from CBP, Office of Internal Affairs; DHS, Office of Inspector General; USCIS, Office of Security and Integrity; and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Criminal complaints and indictments contain allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in court.

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