



# Department of Justice

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## Guilty Plea of Former Government Official

(Alexandria, Virginia) – Gerardo Chavez, age 46, of Clifton, Virginia, pled guilty today to a two-count criminal information charging him with receiving bribes as a public official (Count One) and conspiracy to commit honest services wire fraud and money laundering (Count Two). Dana J. Boente, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; Richard L. Skinner, Inspector General, Department of Homeland Security; and Joseph Persichini, Jr., Assistant Director in Charge, Washington Field Office, Federal Bureau of Investigation, made the announcement after the plea was accepted by United States District Judge T.S. Ellis III.

Sentencing has been set for February 13, 2009. Chavez faces a maximum penalty of 15 years of imprisonment and a fine of \$250,000.

In a statement of facts filed with his plea agreement, Chavez acknowledged that from August 2003 to August 2007, while serving in Caracas, Venezuela on behalf of the United States government as a Supervisory Special Agent and Attaché for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (formerly U.S. Customs Service), and later as Deputy Assistant Director, International Operations at ICE headquarters in Washington, D.C., he steered sole source U.S. government contracts, totaling \$2.8 million, to a company in Caracas. The contracts were for the purchase and armoring of 4-wheel drive vehicles to be used by U.S. law enforcement and government personnel throughout the South America and Caribbean region. Chavez received kickbacks totaling \$172,000 from the owner of the company, with another \$87,000 anticipated from the scheme prior to its being uncovered by U.S. government law enforcement agents.

The statement of facts further describes how Chavez abused his position of trust as a government official and laundered the proceeds of his bribery scheme. The money laundering concerned Chavez's purchase of real property in California, in his brother-in-law's name, and by purchasing and remodeling his residence in Clifton, Va. As part of his plea agreement with the government, Chavez has agreed to forfeit his real property, and proceeds from bank accounts and the sale of a personal vehicle.

This case was investigated by the Inspector General's Special Investigation Division and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington Field Office. Assistant United States Attorneys W. Neil Hammerstrom, Jr. and Karen L. Taylor are prosecuting the case on behalf of the United States.

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