



Department of Justice

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Eastern District of California

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, April 6, 2009

www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae

Docket #: 1:07-cr-334-AWI

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REEDLEY MINI-MART OWNER SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR CASHING THOUSANDS OF FRAUDULENT UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT CHECKS

FRESNO, Calif.—Acting United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown announced today that United States District Judge Anthony W. Ishii sentenced MARIA SANCHEZ, 46, of Reedley, Calif., to four years and nine months in prison for charges stemming from her laundering of thousands of fraudulent unemployment insurance benefits checks as owner of “4-Way Mini Market” in Reedley. SANCHEZ pleaded guilty in October 2008 to conspiracy to launder money.

This case is the product of an extensive investigation by the United States Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, and the California Employment Development Department, Investigation Division.

According to Assistant United States Attorneys Stanley A. Boone and Sheila K. Oberto, who prosecuted the case, from January 2000 until August 2005, SANCHEZ cashed approximately 23,000 fraudulent unemployment insurance checks from as far north as Hamilton City in Glenn County, to as far south as Calexico, Calif. at her store in Reedley. As part of the scheme, SANCHEZ would cash fraudulent unemployment insurance checks on behalf of the other persons who had fraudulently acquired individuals’ identities and filed false claims with the California Employment Development Department (EDD). SANCHEZ charged a higher than normal fee for each check she cashed, which added up to approximately \$7 million.

Judge Ishii, in sentencing SANCHEZ, also imposed restitution of \$6,979,104.40 and three years of supervised release.

“Today’s sentencing sends a clear message that combating fraud in the Unemployment Insurance program remains a priority for our agency. Stealing the identities of unsuspecting, innocent citizens to defraud a program that provides income assistance to those who lose their jobs through no fault of their own is unacceptable,” said Daniel R. Petrole, Deputy Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor. “We are committed to working with other law enforcement agencies to vigorously investigate this type of crime.”

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