

NEWS RELEASE



***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
San Diego, California***

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For Immediate Release

San Diego Lobbyist Makes Initial Appearance for Role in Campaign Finance Crimes

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – January 22, 2014

San Diego, CA – Marco Polo Cortes, a San Diego-based lobbyist, made an initial appearance in federal district court today on charges that he conspired to finance political campaigns using money from an illegal foreign source.

Cortes was arrested by FBI Agents on Tuesday, January 21, 2014 in the Little Italy section of San Diego, pursuant to an arrest warrant. According to the complaint, filed by an FBI Special Agent and unsealed by U.S. Magistrate Judge William V. Gallo, Cortes

conspired with Ravneet Singh and Ernesto Encinas—each of whom were named in a similar complaint unsealed yesterday—to funnel more than \$500,000 of illegal foreign money into San Diego municipal and federal campaigns, primarily in 2012 and 2013. The source of the illegal foreign money, the complaint stated, was a person referred to as “the Foreign National.”

As set forth in the complaint, Cortes has lobbied San Diego Police Department officials, city council members and mayoral staff. In 2012, Cortes and a coconspirator approached a representative of a person running for federal elective office during the 2012 general election cycle. But one of the candidate’s representatives informed Cortes that the Foreign National would need to at least show proof of a green card, and emailed Cortes a link to the Federal Election Commission’s rules on foreign contributions. Despite this, Cortes and a coconspirator helped the Foreign National contribute in the Straw Donor’s name instead.

Later, Cortes joined together with Singh and other coconspirators to facilitate illegal in-kind contributions to a candidate for the office of mayor during the 2012 general election cycle. Finally, in September 2013, Cortes met with a confidential informant to discuss the possibility of arranging additional contributions from the Foreign National to a candidate for the office of mayor during the 2013 special election.

Acting United States Attorney Cindy M. Cipriani praised the continuing efforts of

the FBI and IRS, noting “we will not tolerate fraud in our elections at any level, and we will root out the influence of foreign money in our electoral processes and on our elected leaders.”

Complaints are not evidence that the defendant committed the crime charged. All defendants are presumed innocent until the United States meets its burden in court of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

DEFENDANT

Case Number:

Marco Polo Cortes
Age: 44
San Diego, CA

14MJ0171

SUMMARY OF CHARGES AND MAXIMUM PENALTIES

Count 1: Conspiracy to Commit Offenses against the United States – 18 U.S.C. § 371.
Maximum penalties: 5 years in prison, 3 years of supervised release, \$250,000 fine and a \$100 special assessment

INVESTIGATING AGENCIES

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Internal Revenue Service
San Diego Police Department