

Former federal officer receives more charges for alien smuggling

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Texas

LAREDO, Texas – A 36-year-old Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer previously charged with bribery and drug trafficking has now also been indicted for illegally smuggling four undocumented aliens into the United States, announced U.S. Attorney Alamdar S. Hamdani.

Emanuel Celedon remains in custody and is set to make his initial appearance on the new charges before U.S. Magistrate Judge Christopher dos Santos at 10 a.m., at which time the court will also hold his detention hearing. Two others - Homero Romero-Hernandez, 30, and Jose Osvaldo Zapata Vasquez, 24, both Mexican nationals illegally residing in the United States, are also expected to make appearances. The final person charged - Beatris Martinez, 20, Cotulla, is set for her initial appearance Jan. 4, 2024 at 9:40 a.m. before Judge dos Santos.

Celedon had previously worked at the Port of Entry (POE) in Laredo at the time of the offenses.

The superseding indictment, returned Dec. 27, charges Celedon and Martinez with four counts of bringing an undocumented alien to the United States on two separate dates in September and November. Zapata and Romero are charged similarly in three counts.

Celedon was previously indicted Nov. 28 for two counts of bribery and two counts of attempted importation of cocaine. Those charges allege that, on separate two occasions in October, Celedon accepted U.S. currency in exchange for allowing an individual to transport a substance he believed to be several kilograms of cocaine into the United States from Mexico through the Laredo POE without inspection.

If convicted of the new human smuggling charges, he faces up to 40 years in federal prison. The previous bribery charges carry up to 15 years in prison each and a possible \$250,000 maximum fine. A conviction on the cocaine importation charges carry a maximum sentence of up to 40 years and a possible maximum \$5 million fine.

The Department of Homeland Security - Office of Inspector General, Drug Enforcement Administration, Homeland Security Investigations and CBP- Office of Professional Responsibility conducted the investigation with assistance

from the Texas Department of Public Safety, Border Patrol, Webb County Constable Precinct 2 and CBP Laredo Joint Forensic Center. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Richard Bennett and Jennifer Day are prosecuting the case.

This investigation is related to an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) case. OCDETF identifies, disrupts and dismantles the highest-level criminal organizations that threaten the United States using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. Additional information about the OCDETF Program can be found on the [Department of Justice's OCDETF webpage](#).

This case is also supported by Joint Task Force Alpha (JTFA). Attorney General Merrick B. Garland created JTFA in June 2021 in partnership with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to strengthen the Justice Department's overall efforts to combat the rise in prolific and dangerous smuggling emanating from Central America and impacting our border communities. JTFA is comprised of detailees from southwest border U.S. Attorneys' Offices, including the Southern and Western Districts of Texas, District of New Mexico, District of Arizona and Southern District of California. Numerous components of the Criminal Division are part of JTFA and provide dedicated support for the program which the Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section leads. The Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training; Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section; Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section; Office of Enforcement Operations; Office of International Affairs and Violent Crime and Racketeering Section also provide support. JTFA also relies on substantial law enforcement investment from DHS, FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration and other partners. To date, JTFA's work has resulted in over 260 domestic and international arrests of leaders, organizers and significant facilitators of human smuggling; more than 170 convictions; significant jail sentences imposed; and substantial asset forfeiture.

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

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