

# [***Rep. Henry Cuellar and his wife allegedly took nearly $600,000 in bribes, indictment says***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BY3-G0S1-DY7V-G18D-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Democratic Rep. Henry Cuellar of Texas and his wife have been charged with accepting nearly $600,000 in bribes from two foreign entities, according to an indictment in federal court in Texas.

The alleged scheme took place from late 2014 through at least November 2021, the indictment says.

The congressman and his wife, Imelda Cuellar, made their initial court appearance on Friday in Houston and were released on a $100,000 bond. They are facing several charges, including conspiracy to commit bribery of a federal official, violating the ban on public officials acting as agents of a foreign principal and money laundering.

In a statement on Friday, Cuellar said: "I want to be clear that both my wife and I are innocent of these allegations. Everything I have done in Congress has been to serve the people of South Texas."

Cuellar said in his statement that actions he took in Congress were "in the interest of the American people" and vowed to continue his bid for reelection in November. The congressman also defended his wife, saying that, "The allegation that she is anything but qualified and hard working is both wrong and offensive."

"The actions I took in Congress were consistent with the actions of many of my colleagues and in the interest of the American people," Cuellar said.

Prosecutors say that Henry and Imelda Cuellar crafted two yearslong schemes to get bribes from foreign entities - an oil and gas company "wholly owned and controlled by the Government of Azerbaijan, and a bank headquartered in Mexico City."

In exchange for bribe payments from the Azerbaijan oil company, Cuellar "agreed to perform official acts in his capacity as a Member of Congress, to commit acts in violation of his official duties, and to act as an agent of the Government of Azerbaijan" and the bank, the indictment says.

Among those promises, prosecutors allege Cuellar agreed to influence US policy through a "series of legislative measures relating to Azerbaijan's conflict with neighboring Armenia," by giving a pro-Azerbaijani speech on the House floor, inserting language "favored by Azerbaijan" into legislation and committee reports, and advocating for "series of legislative measures relating to Azerbaijan's conflict with neighboring Armenia."

The Texas Democrat also allegedly promised to influence financial regulations in a way that would benefit the Mexican bank and its affiliates, including by working to pressure the Executive Branch on anti-money laundering enforcement practices that "threatened" their business interest and supporting revisions to the criminal money-laundering statutes.

The couple received the bribe payments through shell companies owned by Imelda Cuellar, prosecutors say. They allegedly used the proceeds from the bribery schemes to pay taxes, pay down debt and spend tens of thousands of dollars at restaurants and retail stores. One purchase was for a $12,000 custom gown, according to the indictment.

Cuellar's home and campaign office in Laredo, Texas, were [*raided*](https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/19/politics/henry-cuellar-fbi-texas-home?cid=ios_app) by the FBI in 2022. The charges against Cuellar are not yet publicly available.

A spokesperson for House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries released a statement shortly after Cuellar's charges were reported, saying that the congressman is entitled to the presumption of innocence. But, spokesperson Christie Stephenson said, Cuellar will temporarily step down from his top spot on a House Appropriations Subcommittee while the investigation is ongoing.

"Henry Cuellar has admirably devoted his career to public service and is a valued Member of the House Democratic Caucus. Like any American, Congressman Cuellar is entitled to his day in court and the presumption of innocence throughout the legal process," Stephenson said.

The National Republican Congressional Committee swiftly called on Cuellar to resign.

"If his colleagues truly believe in putting 'people over ***politics***,' they will call on him to resign. If not - they are hypocrites whose statements about public service aren't worth the paper they're written on," Delanie Bomar, a spokesperson for the NRCC, said in a statement.

CORRECTION: This story has been updated to reflect that a spokesperson for Hakeem Jeffries released a statement following news of Cuellar's charges. This story and headline have also been updated with additional developments.

By Haley Talbot and Hannah Rabinowitz, CNN

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