

Hispanic rights leader indicted / Illegal immigrants brought in by 'busload,' feds charge

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Body

The indictment of a national **Hispanic** civil **rights leader** on **charges** of running a multimillion-dollar immigration fraud scheme is the largest such case ever, Justice Department officials say.

The 17-count **federal** indictment filed Tuesday in Las Vegas accuses Jose Velez, president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, of running a nearly \$ 6 million "assembly line" operation that produced fake documents for thousands of **illegal** Asian and **Hispanic immigrants**. Three Taiwanese businessmen also were **indicted**.

The Velez indictment, coupled with reports of **illegal** Chinese **immigrants** being smuggled into the USA, provides a glimpse of the lucrative underground trafficking in human cargo that investigators say has grown dramatically.

"No one can put a dollar value on it . . . but there's no question it's a big-time business, ranging from the nickel-and-dime 'coyotes' (smugglers) on the Mexican border to large organized-crime syndicates," says Alan Nelson, former commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

LULAC, which lobbies for political, economic and educational **rights** for **Hispanic** Americans, was not accused of any wrongdoing.

But some officials said the **charges** are embarrassing and there is fear they could hurt other **Hispanic** groups.

Velez, 56, has been under investigation by INS since 1990, when authorities revoked his company's **right** to handle immigration cases and raided LULAC offices in Las Vegas seeking evidence of fraud.

The Velez indictment **charges** that between March 1988 and January 1991, Velez and his immigration consulting firm, Velez and Sons, **brought illegal immigrants** to Las Vegas "by **busloads**" to file false applications for amnesty under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act.

The law allowed **illegal immigrants** who had lived continuously in the USA before 1982 to legalize their status. It also allowed **immigrants** who did seasonal agricultural work to legalize their status. Both programs are now closed.

Velez and co-defendants, Billy Tzeng, Simon Chang and Al Feng, are **charged** with conspiring to falsely claim in documents, applications and statements to INS that their **illegal** clients qualified for amnesty or as agricultural workers.

Velez's son Peter pleaded guilty March 22 to helping his father process 5,600 false applications for \$ 5.7 million. Five others also pleaded guilty.

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John Russell, a Justice Department spokesman, said two-thirds of the Velez clients were **Hispanic**, many Mexican. The others were Asians, including wealthy Taiwanese. Most applicants were **charged** between \$ 250 to \$ 3,500, but at least one Taiwanese was **charged** \$ 45,000, he said.

Velez is to be arraigned Friday. His lawyer, Edward Marshall, refused to comment but previously had told the Las Vegas Review-Journal that Velez was not involved.

"He gave (his staff) clear and implicit instructions that nobody was to be involved in any illegalities," Marshall said.

Notes

THE NATION; See related story; 03A

Graphic

PHOTO, b/w, AP

Classification

Subject: IMMIGRATION (94%); INDICTMENTS (93%); CIVIL **RIGHTS** (90%); **HISPANIC** AMERICANS (90%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (90%); SMUGGLING (90%); FRAUD & FINANCIAL CRIME (90%); IMMIGRATION LAW (90%); JUSTICE DEPARTMENTS (90%); INVESTIGATIONS (90%); ALIEN SMUGGLING (90%); **ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS** (89%); AMNESTY (89%); HUMAN **RIGHTS** & CIVIL LIBERTIES LAW (89%); GUILTY PLEAS (89%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); ORGANIZED CRIME (78%); CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS (78%); IMMIGRATION REGULATION & POLICY (78%); CONSPIRACY (78%); MANUFACTURING FACILITIES (76%); LAWYERS (75%); **RIGHT** TO EDUCATION (73%); LOBBYING (72%); FARM LABOR (65%); SEASONAL WORKERS (62%); HUMAN TRAFFICKING (55%)

Company: VELEZ&CO (94%); VELEZ&CO (94%); LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS (84%)

Organization: LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS (84%)

Industry: MANUFACTURING FACILITIES (76%); LAWYERS (75%); FARM LABOR (65%); AGRICULTURE (62%)

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