

GRINCH THAT STOLE AMERICAN DREAM. Fed named Christmas in bribe rap

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Body

SANTA CLAUS WON'T be stopping at Melford **Christmas**' house this year.

The naughty **federal** immigration officer was busted yesterday for shaking down at least four victims who were applying for citizenship, authorities said.

Christmas, 41, worked in the Garden City, L.I., immigration office, where he interviewed permanent residents seeking to become naturalized citizens - testing them for English proficiency and on **American** history and civics.

The criminal complaint filed in Long Island **Federal** Court alleges that **Christmas** demanded **bribes** ranging from \$500 to \$3,000 to approve their applications.

In one case, an applicant had failed the English and **American** history exams and returned to **Christmas**' office on July 24, 2007, for a makeup test.

After reading two sentences written by the applicant, **Christmas** agreed to pass him in exchange for \$800, according to the complaint.

Another time, **Christmas** allegedly learned an applicant had \$3,000 in the bank and told him that although it was "not much money, he would still try to help" - for \$2,750.

Bribe money did not change hands in the government office. **Christmas** allegedly made plans to meet the applicants near their homes after work.

"The defendant allegedly exploited the immigrant quest for citizenship to line his pockets," said Joseph Demarest, assistant director of the FBI's New York office.

"In doing so, he corrupted the process and betrayed a position of trust."

If convicted, **Christmas**' own civic lesson in the criminal justice system could result in 15 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Christmas, of Woodhaven, Queens, was released on \$100,000 bail.

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