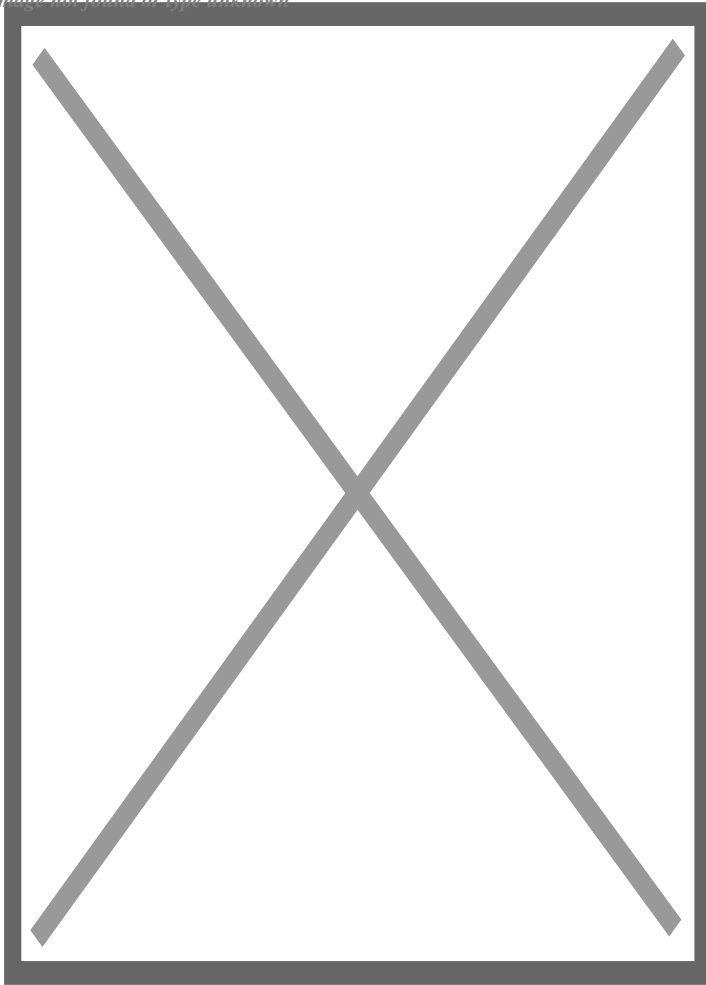


U.S. Senator Bob Menendez indicted on bribery charges

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Washington, September 23 (RHC)-- Top U.S. Senator Bob Menendez and his wife have been charged with bribery, as prosecutors accused the pair of accepting bribes for a range of corrupt acts, including influencing foreign policy for the benefit of Egypt.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan on Friday accused Menendez and his wife Nadine of accepting hundreds of dollars in bribes in connection to their relationship with three New Jersey businessmen.

"Those bribes included cash, gold, payments toward a home mortgage, compensation for a low-or-no-show job, a luxury vehicle, and other things of value," the indictment read.

A search of the couple's home turned up \$100,000 in gold bars and \$480,000 in hidden cash, prosecutors said.

Menendez and his wife face three criminal counts each: conspiracy to commit bribery, conspiracy to commit honest services fraud and conspiracy to commit extortion under colour of official right.

In a statement after the charges were made public, Menendez said he was the subject of an "active smear campaign". He also accused prosecutors of making false claims about him and his wife and suggested opponents could not "accept that a first-generation Latino American" might serve with integrity in the U.S. legislature.

"They have misrepresented the normal work of a Congressional office," the statement said. "On top of that, not content with making false claims against me, they have attacked my wife for the longstanding friendships she had before she and I even met."

Menendez, the 69-year-old chair of the influential US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, had previously been charged in New Jersey with accepting private flights, campaign contributions and other bribes from a wealthy patron in exchange for official favours. However, a 2017 trial ended in a jury deadlock. The senator cited his past legal woes in his statement on Friday.

Menendez, who has been in the US Senate since 2006, appears to be the first sitting senator in US history to have been indicted on two unrelated criminal allegations, according to a list maintained by the Senate Historical Office.

Menendez faces re-election next year in a bid to extend his three-decade career in Washington. Democrats hold a narrow majority in the Senate.

Menendez first publicly disclosed that he was the subject of a new federal investigation last October. Prosecutors declined at the time to comment, but some details of their investigation emerged in news reports and court records.

They are seeking to have Menendez forfeit assets including his New Jersey home, a 2019 Mercedes-Benz and about \$566,000 in cash, gold bars and funds from a bank account. The businessmen — Wael Hana, Jose Uribe and Fred Daibes — were also charged in the scheme.

Prosecutors said Hana, who is originally from Egypt, arranged dinners and meetings between Menendez and Egyptian officials in 2018, during which the officials pressed the senator about the status of U.S. military aid. In exchange, Hana put Nadine Menendez on his company's payroll.

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