

Beat: Miscellaneous

U.S. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) charged in corruption probe

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USPA News - U.S. Senator Robert Menendez was charged Wednesday in connection with a bribery scheme in which the Democrat from New Jersey allegedly accepted gifts from a Florida ophthalmologist in exchange for using his position in Congress to benefit his friend's financial and personal interests. Menendez, 61, and Salomon Melgen, also 61, of West Palm Beach, Florida, were indicted in the District of New Jersey for one count of conspiracy, one count of violating the travel act, eight counts of bribery and three counts of honest services fraud.

Menendez was also charged with one count of making false statements. According to allegations, between January 2006 and January 2013, Menendez accepted close to \$1 million worth of lavish gifts and campaign contributions from Melgen in exchange for using the power of his Senate office to influence the outcome of ongoing contractual and Medicare billing disputes worth tens of millions of dollars to Melgen and to support the visa applications of several of Melgen's girlfriends. Prosecutors allege that, among other gifts, Menendez accepted flights on Melgen's private jet, a first-class commercial flight and a flight on a chartered jet; numerous vacations at Melgen's villa in the Dominican Republic and at a hotel room in Paris; and \$40,000 in contributions to his legal defense fund and over \$750,000 in campaign contributions. Menendez failed to disclose these gifts on his financial disclosure forms. As part of the bribery schemes, Menendez allegedly supported the tourist and student visa applications of three of Melgen's girlfriends, as well as the visa application of the younger sister of one of Melgen's girlfriends. Throughout these efforts, Menendez allegedly engaged in advocacy for Melgen all the way up to the highest levels of the U.S. government, including meeting with a U.S. cabinet secretary, contacting a U.S. Ambassador, and meeting with the heads of executive agencies. Menendez, who is on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has rejected the allegations against him, slamming the investigation as a "smear campaign." "Every action that I and my office have taken for the last 22 years that I have been privileged to be in the United States Congress, has been based on pursuing the best policies for the people of New Jersey and of this entire country," he said at a press conference last month. Menendez added: "As to Dr. Melgen, anyone who knows us knows that he and his family, and me and my family, have been real friends for more than two decades. We celebrated holidays together, we have been there for family weddings, and sad times, like funerals, and have given each other birthday, holiday, and wedding presents, just as friends do."

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