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TWENTY-EIGHT AUSTIN AIRPORT EMPLOYEES CHARGED FOR USING FALSE INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTS TO OBTAIN SECURE AREA ACCESS BADGES

(Austin, Texas), **United States Attorney Johnny Sutton** announced today that twenty-eight individuals, with access to security sensitive areas at Austin Bergstrom International Airport, have been charged in separate indictments with providing false and fraudulent information on application forms to obtain access badges to secure areas.

Federal law enforcement authorities arrested fifteen of the twenty-eight defendants this morning as part of **Operation Tarmac**, a massive multi-agency investigation designed to promote heightened security at our nation's airports. Those defendants had their initial appearances today in federal court before U.S. Magistrate Judge Andrew Austin. The individuals arrested are as follows:

Franciso Bayona, 41
Servando Bueno, 21
Juan Armando Gonzalez, 37
Omar Gonzales, 25
Cristina Guerrero, 23
Jose Juarez, 28
Emmanuel Marin, 21
Luis C. Martinez, 23
Salatiel G. Martinez, 23
Luis Vaca Mendez, 24
Margarita Neave, 31
Espedal Rodriguez, 25
Hoguer Rodriguez, 22
Maria Emma Rodriguez, 27
Eloy Vaca, 23

Today's arrests are the result of an investigation that began in October 2002. More than 5,000 employees with permitted access to secure areas of Austin Bergstrom International Airport were screened and found to have honestly and correctly obtained their security clearances. Twenty-eight of those, all with active security badges as of the date of the indictment, were found to have intentionally and repeatedly lied in order to obtain a security clearance. On January 21, 2003, a federal grand jury returned the sealed indictments against 28 individuals. Of the 28 individuals charged, fifteen were arrested this morning and arrest warrants have been issued for the remaining individuals.

“**Operation Tarmac** underscores the importance of ensuring there are no gaps in airport security. In the post September 11th environment, we must take extra precautions to ensure the flying public’s safety. Allowing individuals who are in the United States illegally and have intentionally and repeatedly falsified their identifies to have access to the most secure areas of the Austin Airport poses an unnecessary security risk and one the U.S. Attorney’s office will not tolerate,” stated **U.S. Attorney Johnny Sutton**.

Each of the twenty eight defendants are charged with having obtained Security Identification Display Area (SIDA) access badges as a result of having provided false information on their security clearance form. These badges permit an individual access to all restricted and secured areas of the airport, including the control tower as well as the interior and cargo holds of the planes. Certain defendants are additionally charged with using false social security numbers, false visas, permits, and other U.S. documents.

Upon conviction, the use of a false writing or document charge carries a maximum sentence of 5 years in prison, to be followed by 3 years of supervised release, and a \$250,000 fine. The charge of using a false social security number carries a maximum sentence of 5 years in prison, to be followed by 3 years of supervised release, and a \$250,000 fine. Conviction on the fraud and misuse of false visas, permits, and other U.S. documents charge carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, to be followed by 3 years of supervised release, and a \$250,000 fine.

Upon completion of any term of imprisonment, each defendant may be subject to deportation to his or her country of origin.

The cases were investigated by the U.S. Department of Transportation - Office of Inspector General, U.S. Treasury-Inspector General for Tax Administration, Social Security Administration - Office of Inspector General, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Immigration and Naturalization Service, U.S. Customs, and the Transportation Security Administration. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael McCaul, Chief of Anti Terrorism and National Security Unit and Assistant U.S. Attorney Anthony Brown.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.

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