

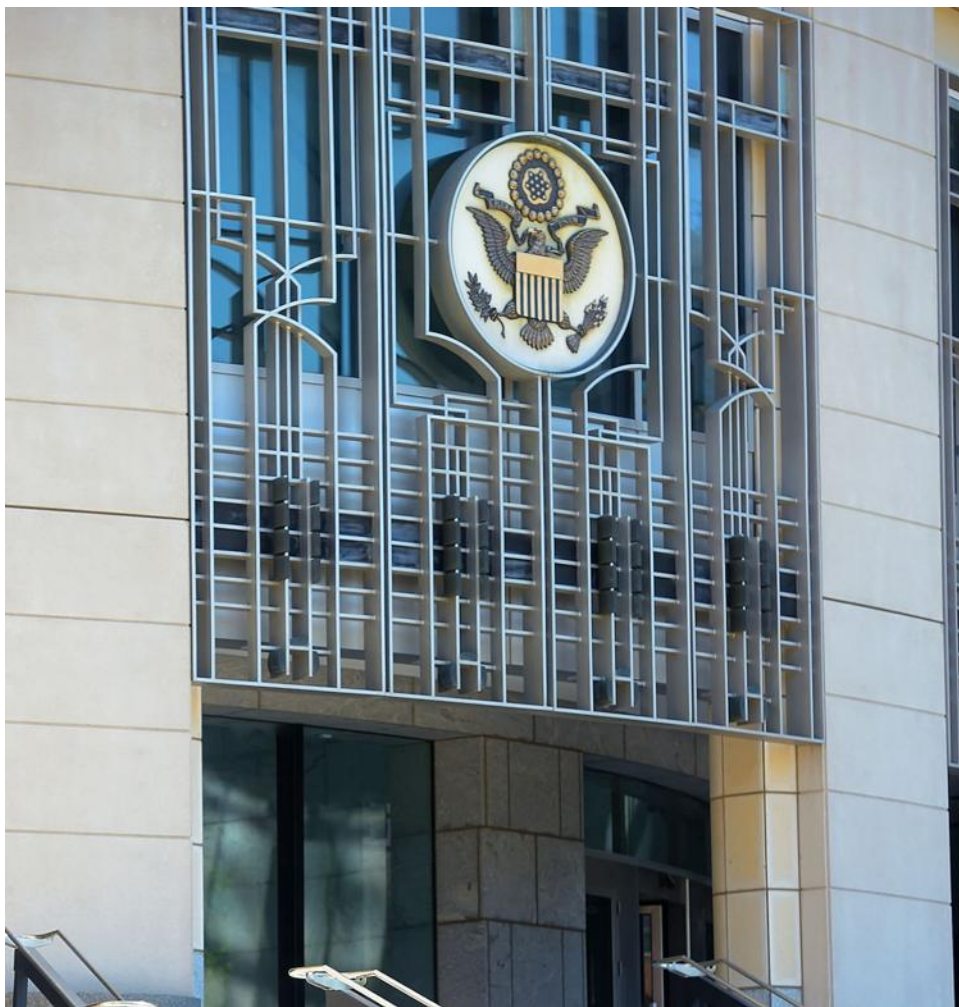
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TOP STORY

Former resident pleads guilty to tax, voter fraud charges

News-Press Now

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A Cuban national who formerly resided in St. Joseph pleaded guilty in federal court Monday to charges in two separate indictments.

Leonardo Lleras-Rodriguez, 55, of Kansas City, Missouri, a citizen of Cuba, pleaded guilty before U.S. Chief District Judge Greg Kays to the charges contained in two separate federal indictments, according to a release from the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri's office.

Lleras-Rodriguez pleaded guilty to casting a fraudulent election ballot and, in a separate case, to three counts of aiding and assisting in the preparation of false income tax returns.

By pleading guilty, Lleras-Rodriguez admitted that he cast a fraudulent ballot in six elections from 2010 through 2014 for federal, state and local candidates, including the presidential election on Nov. 6, 2012. Lleras-Rodriguez also admitted that he prepared fraudulent federal income tax returns for numerous clients.

Lleras-Rodriguez falsely claimed to be a U.S. citizen when he registered to vote in Buchanan County on Nov. 5, 2009. Under Missouri law, only persons who are U.S. citizens who have not been convicted of a felony are eligible to vote.

Lleras-Rodriguez was convicted in the Middle District of Florida of conspiracy to distribute cocaine on June 27, 2000, and sentenced to 37 months in federal prison. When Lleras-Rodriguez was released from prison on Feb. 7, 2003, he was turned over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement for deportation processing. Lleras-Rodriguez was ordered to be deported from the United States, but due to the inability to obtain a travel document from Cuba, he was placed on an ICE order of supervision until a travel document to deport him to Cuba could be obtained.

Lleras-Rodriguez, who operated a self-owned tax preparation business in St. Joseph, also pleaded guilty to preparing three fraudulent tax returns in February and March 2014 that included false claims for

itemized deductions. According to court documents, Lleras-Rodriguez prepared 45 fraudulent tax returns from 2012 to 2014, which resulted in a total tax loss to the United States of \$134,898.

Under federal statutes, Lleras-Rodriguez is subject to a sentence of up to five years in federal prison without parole for casting a fraudulent ballot and a sentence of up to three years in federal prison without parole on each of the three counts of false income tax returns. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the completion of a presentence investigation by the United States Probation Office.

Jess DeHaven

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