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Previously deported criminal alien pleads guilty to voter fraud, illegal reentry and falsely claiming US citizenship

SAN DIEGO – A previously deported criminal alien pleaded guilty Thursday in federal court to illegally voting in the 2008 presidential election using the name of a U.S. citizen whose identity he assumed more than two decades ago.

Ricardo Lopez-Munguia, 45, of Escondido, pleaded guilty to three felony counts of voter fraud, making a false claim to U.S. citizenship and illegal reentry after deportation. The charges are the result of a probe by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

Lopez faces a maximum penalty of 28 years in prison when he is sentenced November 19. Upon completion of his sentence, Lopez will be deported to Mexico.

As part of his guilty plea, Lopez admitted he was convicted of two drug trafficking offenses involving heroin in 1986. In 1987, an immigration judge ordered Lopez deported as an aggravated felon. Lopez admitted he subsequently assumed the identity of a U.S. citizen, which he used to illegally reenter the United States, obtain a Social Security card and a U.S. passport, and to vote.

"Our unique, broad authorities serve to protect the public from widespread exploitation by fraudsters who never seem to know when to quit," said Derek Benner, special agent in charge for HSI San Diego.

"Whether we're protecting the integrity of the legal immigration system, rooting out voter fraud or uncovering identity theft, HSI is committed to aggressively investigating fraud that undermines our nation's bedrock institutions."

As part of a collaborative operation in July, officers from U.S. Customs and Border Protection took Lopez into custody at the San Ysidro port of entry.

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