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## 2 Men Charged for Cuban Travel Fraud

David Fischer - Business Week

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Two men were arrested and charged with using fake religious organizations to get thousands of people permission to travel to Cuba, prosecutors said Thursday.

Victor Vazquez and David Margolis began to use nonexistent religious organizations in April 2006 to apply for federal government licenses that would allow U.S. residents to travel to Cuba, U.S. Attorney Alex Acosta said.

The men then provided the licenses to travel agencies, which sold the use of them to more than 4,500 people. Besides the normal cost of tickets, the agencies charged travelers about \$250 extra for each use of the license, Acosta said.

Vazquez and Margolis each have been charged by federal complaint with one count of conspiring to violate Cuba-related travel regulations. Vazquez was also charged with two counts of lying on applications to obtain religious travel licenses to Cuba. The maximum sentence for each charge is five years.

They were arrested and made their first court appearances Wednesday in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Margolis was released on a \$1.25 million bond.

Margolis' attorney Richard Rosenbaum said he plans to plead not guilty and defend the case vigorously if an indictment is handed down.

"Mr. Margolis has never been in trouble for anything in his entire life," Rosenbaum said.

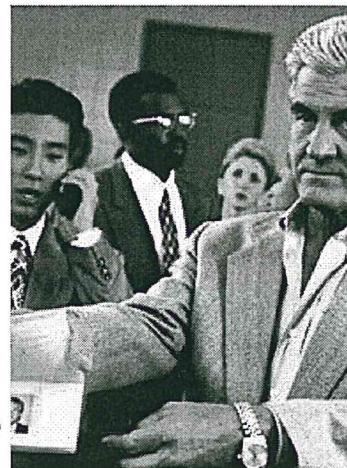
Prosecutors requested that no bond be set for Vazquez, whose pretrial detention hearing began Thursday and will continue Friday.

A telephone message left at the office of Robert Eckard, who is representing Vazquez, was not immediately returned.

"Today's criminal charges are a wake-up call to those who seek to violate the economic and trade sanctions against the Cuban regime," Acosta said at a news conference.

The Cuban Sanctions Enforcement Task Force, which is chaired by the U.S. Attorney's Office, conducted the investigation into Vazquez and Margolis. The task force includes the Treasury Department, FBI, and departments of Homeland Security and Commerce.

So far, Vazquez and Margolis are the only ones with criminal complaints against them in the case. Acosta would not say if his office had specific plans to bring charges against the travel agencies or the thousands of people who were able to go to Cuba because of the licenses. He said he first wants to focus on the people most responsible, but the investigation is ongoing.


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