



Lesson From Ex-Congressman's Plight: Follow Rules, Come Clean

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Federal prosecutors often take very seriously the prohibitions on illegal lobbying and on withholding the truth from the FBI. That's one of the lessons that former U.S. Rep. Mark Siljander probably learned last month when he pleaded guilty to two federal charges relating to his alleged ties to an Islamic charity claimed to have funded money to international terrorists.

When Siljander was indicted in January 2008 on charges of money laundering, obstruction of justice, and conspiracy related to his dealings with the now-defunct Islamic America Relief Agency, then based in Columbia, Mo., the news created quite a stir. The alleged involvement of a conservative former Michigan congressman with a charity suspected of having terrorist ties made headlines. Siljander faced charges of money laundering and conspiracy, among other charges.

The money laundering and conspiracy charges will now be dismissed after Siljander's July plea to illegal lobbying and obstruction of justice.

Prosecutors say, and Siljander has acknowledged, that he received \$75,000 from the charity to push for its removal from a U.S. Senate Finance Committee list of charities assisting terrorism and that the group paid him with funds obtained from the U.S. Agency for International Development for work it was supposed to have done in Africa but didn't.



Prosecutors also say that Siljander lied to the FBI about being hired to lobby for the charity. He told investigators that the money he received was actually a donation to help him write a book about Islam and Christianity.

No terrorism charges were ever made against Siljander, and the headline-grabbing money laundering and conspiracy charges were dismissed. But he still faces up to 15 years in prison and a fine of up to \$500,000 after pleading guilty.

As is often the case in white-collar crime, the lesson is to follow the rules and if you do decide, for whatever reason, to speak to authorities – tell the truth.

Without the plea deal, Siljander could have been sentenced to life in prison. Since there is no minimum sentence for either charge to which Siljander pleaded guilty, he will face a much lighter sentence, including possibly probation, but more likely two to three years.

Crime in the Suites is authored by the [Ifrah Law Firm](#), a Washington DC-based law firm specializing in the defense of government investigations and litigation. Our client base spans many regulated industries, particularly e-business, e-commerce, government contracts, gaming and healthcare.

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