

Former Congressman Mark Siljander Sentenced for FARA Violation

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On January 11, 2012, Mark D. Siljander, former Member of Congress from Michigan, was sentenced in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Missouri, in Kansas City, to one year and one day, without parole, in federal prison for obstruction of justice and for acting as an unregistered foreign agent, in violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). The charges on which Siljander was sentenced, and to which he pled guilty in July 2010, arose from his work for the Islamic American Relief Agency (IARA), an Islamic charity with ties to international terrorism.

In connection with Siljander's sentencing, Beth Phillips, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, stated that IARA "secretly funneled more than a million dollars to Iraq in violation of United States economic sanctions. IARA then hired [former congressman Siljander] to lobby the government on its behalf after it was listed as a specially designated global terrorist organization due to the support its international offices provided to Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban." According to the U.S. Attorney's Office, Siljander and his co-defendants in this matter agreed to conceal Siljander's efforts on IARA's behalf and did so, in part, by a scheme through which Siljander was paid by funneling IARA funds through nonprofit entities. Siljander also admitted to obstructing justice by lying repeatedly to FBI agents and prosecutors about his ties to IARA and about the purpose of payments from IARA.

Sentenced along with former congressman Siljander were his four codefendants: Mbarek Hamed, IARA Executive Director, who received a sentence of four years, 10 months, without parole; Abdel Azim El-Siddig, a fundraiser for IARA, sentenced to two years probation; and Ali Mohamed Bageni, an IARA board member, and Ahmad Mustafa,

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an IARA fundraiser, both sentenced to six months probation.

Siljander had been the Member of Congress from Michigan's fourth district from 1981 to 1987.

The Siljander case and other recent prosecutions (see the January 2012 "Guilty Plea by Syed Ghulam Nabi Fai under FARA" article in Wiley Rein's *Election Law News*) demonstrates the federal government's continuing commitment to enforce FARA and related statutes. As stated by Brian Truchon, the FBI Special Agent in Charge on this matter: "The sentencing of these individuals signifies the FBI's long-term commitment to prevent the compromise of national security caused by misappropriation of government funds and charitable donations and their use for illegal purposes and in violation of federal economic sanctions."