

Democratic Senator Robert Menendez convicted of bribery, acting as a foreign agent

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United States Senator Robert Menendez, a Democrat from New Jersey, was convicted of 16 federal corruption charges on Tuesday. He is the first senator to be found guilty of acting as an agent of a foreign power (in this case, Egypt) and the only senator to have been indicted twice.

The other charges include bribery, extortion, obstruction of justice, honest services wire fraud and conspiracy. Sentencing is scheduled for October 29. Eight of the charges entail potential 20-year terms, which would, however, be served concurrently. He has vowed to appeal his conviction.

Menendez epitomizes the deep-seated mendacity, corruption and arrogance of the Democratic Party and the venal, right-wing social layer it represents. The Republicans of course are no different. Menendez's political career began 50 years ago on the Board of Education of Union City, New Jersey. He was elected to the state legislature in 1988, the US House of Representatives in 1992 and the US Senate in 2006. As chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Menendez supported the 2014 coup in Ukraine, advocated a hard line against Iran and wholeheartedly defended the Israeli state against the Palestinians.

Menendez has long been known as a senator for sale. In 2015, he was indicted for bribery, fraud and making false statements. The senator was accused of having pressured the government of the Dominican Republic to enforce a contract that would benefit a major campaign donor, Florida ophthalmologist Salomon Melgen. A 2017 trial resulted in a hung jury.

In 2010, Menendez appealed in writing to Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke to approve an acquisition that would prevent First Bank Americano from going into receivership. The New Jersey bank was run by donors to Menendez. A former federal bank regulator

called the senator's intervention "grotesquely inappropriate."

The recent trial of Menendez followed a long investigation and an FBI raid on the senator's New Jersey home. Agents found more than \$480,000 in \$100 bills that had been stuffed in boots, shoeboxes and jackets belonging to Menendez. They also found gold bars worth almost \$150,000. In the driveway was a 2019 Mercedes-Benz convertible that businessman Jose Uribe had given to Nadine Menendez, the senator's wife.

Serial numbers on the gold bars and fingerprints on the stacks of cash linked this evidence to businessmen Wael Hana and Fred Daibes. Uribe pleaded guilty to bribery and testified against his codefendants, who were also convicted.

To help Hana, Menendez protected the monopoly that the Egyptian government had given Hana on certifying that meat exported to that country from the US met Islamic dietary requirements. Menendez pressured a federal agriculture official to stop opposing the monopoly deal when the official raised concerns that it would increase prices.

Menendez also gave Egyptian officials information about the staff at the US Embassy in Cairo and ghostwrote a letter that asked fellow senators to lift a hold on \$300 million in military aid for Egypt. The senator's wife acted as an intermediary, and he told her to inform her Egyptian contacts that he planned to approve \$99 million in tank ammunition. "Anytime you need anything, you have my number, and we will make everything happen," she texted one general.

The Egyptian regime which Menendez secretly served is a police state dictatorship headed by retired general Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who came to power in 2014 in the turbulent aftermath of the 2011 revolution

that overthrew Hosni Mubarak.

Menendez interfered in a federal criminal prosecution of Daibes, a real estate developer who was accused of bank fraud. The senator raised the prosecution with Philip Sellinger, the US attorney for New Jersey, and said that Daibes was “being treated unfairly,” according to Sellinger’s testimony.

Uribe testified that he had given Nadine Menendez the Mercedes-Benz convertible to get the senator’s help in protecting his insurance business. A state criminal investigation of a trucking company owned by Uribe’s friend threatened to have repercussions for Uribe’s own enterprise.

When he was indicted, Menendez sought refuge in patriotism and identity politics. He claimed that he was being persecuted by people who “cannot accept that a first-generation Latino-American from humble beginnings could rise to be a US senator.” During the trial, Menendez sought to blame his wife, claiming that she had financial troubles that she hid from him.

His most significant remark came after the trial. “I have never, ever been a foreign agent,” he said, “and the decision rendered by the jury today would put at risk every member of the United States Senate in terms of what they think a foreign agent would be.” This amounts to an admission that, far from being exceptional, the type of corruption in which Menendez engaged is endemic to the US Congress.

When the verdict was announced, the Senate Ethics Committee vowed to complete its own investigation of Menendez “promptly” and consider a “full range of disciplinary actions,” according to a statement from Senator Christopher Coons (D-Delaware), the committee’s chair, and Senator James Lankford (R-Oklahoma), its vice-chair.

Democrats immediately distanced themselves from the disgraced senator following his conviction. “In light of this guilty verdict, Senator Menendez must now do what is right for his constituents, the Senate and our country, and resign,” said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York in a statement. Cory Booker, the junior senator from New Jersey, also called on Menendez to resign. New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy went further, calling on the Senate to expel Menendez if he did not step down.

Menendez told close supporters yesterday that he would resign, according to NBC News. It now falls to

Governor Murphy to appoint a replacement. After he was indicted, Menendez filed to run for re-election to the Senate as an independent.

Representative Andy Kim, a Democrat, is the favorite to win Menendez’s seat in November. Kim reflects the ongoing integration of the intelligence agencies and the State Department into the Democratic Party. Far from making the Senate more liberal, Kim’s election would ensure continued support for NATO’s proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and for Israel’s genocide in Gaza. Kim also supports arming Taiwan as part of US preparations for war with China.

The conviction of Menendez and the history of his likely successor expose the rot at the heart of the Democratic Party, from which workers and young people must break decisively to oppose genocide, war, fascism and inequality.



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