

PRESS RELEASE

# Former Congressman George Santos Pleads Guilty to Wire Fraud and Aggravated Identity Theft

Monday, August 19, 2024

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York

## **Santos Admits He Filed Fraudulent FEC Reports, Embezzled Funds from Campaign Donors, Charged Credit Cards Without Authorization, Stole Identities, Obtained Unemployment Benefits Through Fraud, and Lied in Report to the House of Representatives**

Earlier today, in federal court in Central Islip, former Congressman George Anthony Devolder Santos pleaded guilty to committing wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. The proceeding was held before United States District Judge Joanna Seybert. When sentenced, Santos faces a minimum sentence of two years' imprisonment and a maximum sentence of 22 years' imprisonment. As part of the plea Santos will pay restitution of \$373,749.97 and forfeiture of \$205,002.97. [Santos was initially charged in May 2023](#), and [a superseding indictment charging Santos with additional crimes was returned in October 2023](#).

Breon Peace, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, Nicole M. Argentieri, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General and head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, Christie M. Curtis, Acting Assistant Director in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI), Anne T. Donnelly, Nassau County District Attorney, and Thomas M. Fattorusso, Special Agent in Charge, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI), announced the guilty plea.

"Today, for what may seem like the first time since he started his campaign for Congress, Mr. Santos told the truth about his criminal schemes. He admitted to lying, stealing and conning people," stated U.S. Attorney Breon Peace for the Eastern District of New York. "By pleading guilty, Mr. Santos has acknowledged that he repeatedly defrauded federal and state government institutions as well as his own family, supporters and constituents. His flagrant and disgraceful conduct has been exposed and will be punished. Mr. Santos's conviction demonstrates this Office's enduring commitment to rooting out corruption and graft by public officials."

Mr. Peace expressed his appreciation to the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General and the New York State Department of Labor, for their work on the case.

"As part of his campaign for election to the U.S. House of Representatives, George Santos committed fraud and identity theft, and lied to the American people about his personal finances and campaign supporters," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Nicole M. Argentieri, head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. "In doing so, Santos violated laws designed to ensure that the public has accurate information about the personal finances of individuals who seek to represent them in Congress and how their political campaigns are funded. The transparency and accuracy that these laws require are essential to the integrity of the election process, and today's conviction is proof that the Criminal Division is committed to enforcing them."

"Today, George Santos admitted that he did in fact lie, cheat, and steal his way to elected office. When public officials place their self-interests above those they swore an oath to serve, it undermines confidence in our system of government and damages the very foundation of our democracy. The FBI is committed to investigating and eradicating public corruption—no matter the form it takes," stated FBI Acting Assistant Director in Charge Curtis.

"George Santos lied to his constituents, cheated his supporters and quite simply made a mockery of his position in public office. Today's guilty plea is a step towards getting justice for those he has wronged. CI New York worked closely with the Eastern District of New York, the FBI and Nassau County DA's office to ensure that Santos faces the consequences for his years of fraud and deceit, because corruption is not to be tolerated," stated IRS CI Special Agent in Charge Fattorusso.

"George Santos built a career on deception and funded his lifestyle using the identities of people he misled, including Nassau County residents who believed they were contributing to Santos' campaign and participating in the electoral process. The defendant rode a wave of his lies all the way to Congress and endlessly abused the trust

of his constituents,” stated Nassau County District Attorney Donnelly. “We will continue to work together with our federal partners at the U.S. Attorney’s Office, the Department of Justice, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to root out corruption on Long Island and hold public officials to the highest standards of integrity.”

The counts to which Santos pled guilty relate to the following criminal scheme, as set forth in the superseding indictment:

### The Party Program Scheme

During the 2022 election cycle, Santos was a candidate for the United States House of Representatives in New York’s Third Congressional District. Nancy Marks, who pleaded guilty on October 5, 2023 to related conduct, was the treasurer for his principal congressional campaign committee, Devolder-Santos for Congress. During this election cycle, Santos and Marks devised and executed a fraudulent scheme to obtain money for the campaign by submitting materially false reports to the Federal Election Commission (FEC) on behalf of the campaign, in which they inflated the campaign’s fundraising numbers for the purpose of misleading the FEC, a national party committee, and the public.

Specifically, the purpose of the scheme was to ensure that Santos and his campaign qualified for a program administered by the national party committee, pursuant to which the national party committee would provide financial and logistical support to Santos’s campaign. To qualify for the program, Santos had to demonstrate, among other things, that his congressional campaign had raised at least \$250,000 from third-party contributors in a single quarter.

To create the public appearance that his campaign had met that financial benchmark and was otherwise financially viable, Santos and Marks agreed to falsely report to the FEC that at least 11 of their family members had made significant financial contributions to the campaign. In fact, Santos and Marks both knew that these individuals had neither made the reported contributions nor given authorization for their personal information to be included in such false public reports. In addition, Santos and Marks knew that the national party committee relied on FEC fundraising data to evaluate candidates’ qualification for the program, and agreed to falsely report to the FEC that Santos had loaned the campaign significant sums of money, when, in fact, Santos had not made the reported loans and, at the time the loans were reported, did not have the funds necessary to make such loans. These falsely reported loans included a \$500,000 loan, when in fact Santos had less than \$8,000 in his personal and business bank accounts.

Through the execution of this scheme, Santos and Marks ensured that Santos met the necessary financial benchmarks to qualify for the program administered by the national party committee. As a result of qualifying for the program, the congressional campaign received significant financial support.

As part of his plea agreement, Santos stipulated that he had engaged in the following additional criminal conduct, as set forth in the superseding indictment and other court filings, and agreed that this criminal conduct will be considered by the Court at the time of sentencing:

#### The Credit Card Fraud Scheme

Between approximately July 2020 and October 2022, Santos devised and executed a fraudulent scheme to steal the personal identity and financial information of contributors to his campaign. He then charged contributors' credit cards repeatedly, without their authorization. Because of these unauthorized transactions, funds were transferred to Santos's campaign, to the campaigns of other candidates for elected office, and to his own bank account. To conceal the true source of these funds and to circumvent campaign contribution limits, Santos falsely represented that some of the campaign contributions were made by other persons, such as his relatives or associates, rather than the true cardholders, in filings with the FEC. Santos did not have authorization to use their names in this way.

#### Fraudulent Political Contribution Solicitation Scheme

Beginning in September 2022, during his successful campaign for Congress, Santos operated a limited liability company (Company #1) through which he defrauded prospective political supporters. Santos enlisted a Queens-based political consultant (Person #1) to communicate with prospective donors on Santos's behalf. Santos directed Person #1 to falsely tell donors that, among other things, their money would be used to help elect Santos to the House, including by purchasing television advertisements. In reliance on these false statements, two donors (Contributor #1 and Contributor #2) each transferred \$25,000 to Company #1's bank account, which Santos controlled.

Shortly after the funds were received into Company #1's bank account, the money was transferred into Santos's personal bank accounts—in one instance laundered through two of Santos's personal accounts. Santos then used much of that money for personal expenses. Among other things, Santos used the funds to make personal purchases, including of designer clothing, to withdraw cash, to discharge personal debts, and to transfer money to his associates.

## Unemployment Insurance Fraud Scheme

Beginning in approximately February 2020, Santos was employed as a Regional Director of a Florida-based investment firm (Investment Firm #1). By late March 2020, in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States, new legislation was signed into law that provided additional federal funding to assist out-of-work Americans during the pandemic.

In mid-June 2020, although he was employed and not eligible for unemployment benefits, Santos applied for government assistance through the New York State Department of Labor (NYS DOL), claiming falsely to have been unemployed since March 2020. From that point until April 2021—during which time Santos was working and receiving a salary on a near-continuous basis, and throughout his first unsuccessful run for Congress—he falsely affirmed each week that he was eligible for unemployment benefits when he was not. As a result, Santos fraudulently received more than \$24,000 in unemployment insurance benefits.

## False Statements to the House of Representatives

Santos, like all candidates for the House, had a legal duty to file with the Clerk of the United States House of Representatives a Financial Disclosure Statement (House Disclosures) before each election. In his House Disclosures, Santos was personally required to give a full and complete accounting of his assets, income, and liabilities, among other things. He certified that his House Disclosures were true, complete, and correct.

In September 2022, in connection with his second campaign for election to the House, Santos filed a House Disclosure in which he vastly overstated his income and assets. In this House Disclosure, he falsely certified that during the reporting period:

- He had earned \$750,000 in salary from the Devolder Organization LLC, a Florida-based entity of which Santos was the sole beneficial owner;
- He had received between \$1,000,001 and \$5,000,000 in dividends from the Devolder Organization LLC;
- He had a checking account with deposits of between \$100,001 and \$250,000; and
- He had a savings account with deposits of between \$1,000,001 and \$5,000,000.

These assertions were false: Santos had not received from the Devolder Organization LLC the reported amounts of salary or dividends and did not maintain checking or savings accounts with deposits in the reported amounts. Further, Santos failed to

disclose that, in 2021, he received approximately \$28,000 in income from Investment Firm #1 and more than \$20,000 in unemployment insurance benefits from the NYS DOL.

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[In July 2022, Mr. Peace was selected as the Chairperson of the White Collar Fraud subcommittee for the Attorney General’s Advisory Committee \(AGAC\).](#) As the leader of the subcommittee, Mr. Peace plays a key role in making recommendations to the AGAC to facilitate the prevention, investigation and prosecution of various financially motivated, non-violent crimes including wire fraud, money laundering, and aggravated identity theft.

The government’s case is being handled by the Office’s Public Integrity Section and Criminal Section of the Office’s Long Island Division, along with the Public Integrity Section of the Department of Justice’s Criminal Division (PIN). Assistant United States Attorneys Ryan Harris, Anthony Bagnuola, and Laura Zuckerwise, along with Trial Attorneys Jacob Steiner and John Taddei, are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from Paralegal Specialists Rachel Friedman and Dinora Orozco. Senior Litigation Counsel Victor R. Salgado and former Trial Attorney Jolee Porter of PIN also provided substantial contributions to the prosecution.

**The Defendant:**

GEORGE ANTHONY DEVOLDER SANTOS

Age: 36

Queens, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 23-CR-197 (S-2) (JS)

**Contact**

John Marzulli

Danielle Blustein Hass

U.S. Attorney's Office

(718) 254-6323

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