

State Dept. official, international jeweler indicted

Scott McCabe, The Examiner
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WASHINGTON -

A U.S. Foreign Service officer was charged with conspiracy and bribery for allegedly approving visas for an international businessman in exchange for jewelry, expensive hotel stays and vacations with two exotic dancers, authorities said Friday.

Michael John O'Keefe, a 22-year veteran of the State Department, was arrested in D.C. Thursday and appeared in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia Friday on charges of conspiracy, bribery, aiding and abetting and criminal forfeiture, the U.S. Attorney's office said.

O'Keefe, 59, is a co-defendant with international jeweler Sunil Agrawal, an Indian national who lives in the New York.

Agrawal remains at large. He is the head of STS Jewels, Inc., an international manufacturer and distributor of semi-precious gems with purported offices in New York, Bangkok, Thailand; Hong Kong, India and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

O'Keefe allegedly approved up to 21 visas for Agrawal. In return, Agrawal is alleged to have showered O'Keefe with round-trip airline tickets and the two exotic dancers. Also, Agrawal is alleged to have provided hotel accommodations and expenses in New York and Las Vegas for O'Keefe, a \$3,000 ring, tickets to Broadway shows and a job reference.

O'Keefe's and Agrawal's plans were documented in a series of e-mails obtained by authorities, according to the indictment.

In one e-mail, O'Keefe wrote that his subordinates wanted to reject one of Agrawal's visa applications because they feared a connection to the terrorist organization al-Qaida.

"Needless to say, I overruled the decision," O'Keefe wrote.

In separate e-mail messages, O'Keefe complained about his job and said his wife was a "jewelry hound." In another, O'Keefe told Agrawal that he never got the candy and fruit basket that the jeweler promised.

He lamented that he had to pay \$262 in customs for a ring Agrawal sent and asked that future gifts be sent to a U.S. address.

O'Keefe told Agrawal that he needed a vacation and asked Agrawal to help out again.

"For some reason," O'Keefe wrote, "I really love Las Vegas. I guess it is because it is a place where I can lose my stiff diplomatic persona."

smccabe@dcexaminer.com
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