



# Department of Justice

United States Attorney's Office  
Western District of Texas

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2017

CONTACT: PAO DARYL FIELDS  
(210) 384-7440

## **AUSTIN ATTORNEY AND BUSINESS PARTNER PLEAD GUILTY TO MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FRAUD**

Austin residents Robert Allen Helms and Janniece S. Kaelin pleaded guilty today to federal charges of defrauding investors in companies that presumably were in the business of purchasing oil and gas royalties, announced United States Attorney Richard L. Durbin, Jr.; Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Special Agent in Charge Christopher Combs, San Antonio Division; United States Secret Service Special Agent in Charge Douglas W. Thigpen, Houston Field Office; and, Texas State Securities Board Commissioner John Morgan.

Appearing before United States Magistrate Judge Make Lane this morning, Helms, age 52, and Kaelin, age 54, pleaded guilty to one count of securities fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud and mail fraud. In pleading guilty, the defendants admitted to defrauding investors between January 2010 and December 2013. The indictment filed in this case alleges that Helms and Kaelin raised millions of dollars from investors through the fraudulent scheme.

Helms, who has been licensed to practice law in Texas since 1995, and Kaelin told investors that they would use the invested funds only for specific business purposes, but the defendants secretly used substantial sums for their own personal expenses. Helms and Kaelin also paid money to investors, ostensibly as the investors' share of operating income, when Helms and Kaelin knew the money came from other investors rather than from business operations. The scheme included forging and counterfeiting documents to create the appearance of mineral and royalty purchases. It also involved moving money between accounts and business entities for no purpose other than creating the false appearance of business operations.

The scheme ended in December 2013, when the United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) sued Helms, Kaelin, and their companies. United States District Judge Lee Yeakel appointed a receiver to take control of the companies, including Vendetta Royalty Partners, Ltd. and Iron Rock Royalty Partners, LP. According to a report filed by the receiver, Helms and Kaelin raised more than \$30 million from investors as part of the scheme.

Helms and Kaelin, both of whom remain on bond pending sentencing, face up to five years in federal prison for each count of conviction and a yet-to-be-determined-amount of restitution to their victims. Sentencing is scheduled for June 28, 2017.

The FBI, the United States Secret Service and the Texas State Securities Board conducted this investigation. Assistant United States Attorneys Alan M. Buie and Grant Sparks are prosecuting this case on behalf of the Government. The United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas appreciates the cooperation and assistance of the SEC's Fort Worth Regional Office.

#####