

Mistake costs dishwasher \$59,000

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MIAMI - For 11 years, Pedro Zapeta, an illegal immigrant from Guatemala, lived his version of the American dream in Stuart, Florida: washing dishes and living frugally to bring money back to his home country. Two years ago, Zapeta was ready to return to Guatemala, so he carried a duffel bag filled with \$59,000 -- all the cash he had scrimped and saved over the years -- to the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

But when Zapeta tried to go through airport security, an officer spotted the money in the bag and called U.S. customs officials. He told the customs officials \$59,000. At that point, U.S. customs seized his money, setting off a two-year struggle for Zapeta to get it back. Zapeta, who speaks no English, said he didn't know he was running afoul of U.S. law by failing to declare he was carrying more than \$10,000 with him. Anyone entering or leaving the country with more than \$10,000 has to fill out a one-page form declaring the money to U.S. customs.

Officials initially accused Zapeta of being a courier for the drug trade, but they dropped the allegation once he produced pay stubs from restaurants where he had worked. Zapeta earned \$5.50 an hour at most of the places where he washed dishes. When he learned to do more, he got a 25-cent raise. Zapeta's story became public last year on CNN and in The Palm Beach Post newspaper, prompting well-wishers to give him nearly \$10,000 -- money that now sits in a trust. Robert Gershman, one of Zapeta's attorneys, said federal prosecutors later offered his client a deal: He could take \$10,000 of the original cash seized, plus \$9,000 in donations as long as he did not talk publicly and left the country immediately.

Now, according to Gershman, the Internal Revenue Service wants access to the donated cash to cover taxes on the donations and on the money Zapeta made as a dishwasher. Zapeta admits he never paid taxes. CNN contacted the U.S. Attorneys office in Miami, U.S. Customs and the IRS about Zapeta's case. They all declined to comment. "When you are poor, uneducated and illegal, your avenues are cut," he said. Zapeta said his goal in coming to the United States was to make enough money to buy land in his mountain village and build a home for his mother and sisters. He sent no money back to Guatemala over the years, he said, and planned to bring it all home at once.

At Wednesday's hearing, Zapeta was given official status in the United States -- voluntary departure -- and a signed order from a judge. For the first time, he can work legally in the U.S. By the end of January, Zapeta may be able to earn enough money to pay for a one-way ticket home so the U.S. government, which seized his \$59,000, does not have to do so.

1. In accordance with information obtained predominately from the passage above, in paragraph form explain precisely what has occurred between Pedro Zapeta and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)?
2. Approximately how long would it take Pedro to earn \$59,000 assuming roughly 23% of his income goes towards taxes and miscellaneous related deductions?
3. What percent pay raise did Pedro receive? What reasons were provided regarding an increase in pay?
4. Assuming Pedro works 40 hours a week, how much more can he anticipate earning over the course of three years in light of his recent increase in pay?
5. In accordance with the United States Department of Labor Employment Standards Administration Wage and Hour Division (Source: <http://www.dol.gov/esa/minwage/america.htm>) the basic minimum employment rate per hour in Florida is approximately \$6.67, Georgia - \$5.15, and Washington state (highest in the nation) is \$7.93. Given this information, why do you believe Pedro's salary is far less? Assuming Pedro was making the legal state minimum in a) Georgia, b) Florida, and c) Washington explain the differences these three figures would have upon question four.
6. What a) fraction, b) decimal, and c) percentage of his income does Pedro stand to lose if he elects to take the deal offered to him by federal prosecutors? What conditions are associated with this agreement?
7. In the passage above, in paragraph form, explain at least five ways using the "Four-Step Reading" poster simplifies understanding of the material. Be specific.
8. In complete sentences, using contextual clues only, explain the meaning of the words: *courier*, *frugally*, *scrimped*, and *seized*. Additionally, use each in a sentence to demonstrate further comprehension.
9. In paragraph form, explain at least five legitimate and educational purposes behind The Daughtry Times.