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Vice president, former AG, state senator indicted



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By CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press Writer © 2008 The Associated Press
Nov. 18, 2008, 8:28PM

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McALLEN, Texas — A South Texas grand jury has indicted Vice President Dick Cheney and former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales on state charges related to the alleged abuse of prisoners in Willacy County's federal detention centers.

The indictment, which had not yet been signed by the presiding judge, was one of seven released Tuesday in a county that has been a source of bizarre legal and political battles in recent years. Another of the indictments named a state senator on charges of profiting from

his position.

Willacy County District Attorney Juan Angel Guerra himself had been under indictment for more than a year and half before a judge dismissed the indictments last month. This flurry of charges came in the twilight of Guerra's tenure, which ends this year after nearly two decades in office. He lost convincingly in a Democratic primary in March.

Cheney's indictment on a charge of engaging in an organized criminal activity criticizes the vice president's investment in the Vanguard Group, which holds interests in the private prison companies running the federal detention centers. It accuses Cheney of a conflict of interest and "at least misdemeanor assaults" on detainees because of his link to the prison companies.

Megan Mitchell, a spokeswoman for Cheney, declined to comment on Tuesday, saying that the vice president had not yet received a copy of the indictment.

The indictment accuses Gonzales of using his position while in office to stop an investigation in 2006 into abuses at one of the privately-run prisons.

Gonzales' attorney, George Terwilliger III, said in a written statement, "This is obviously a bogus charge on its face, as any good prosecutor can recognize. Hopefully, competent Texas authorities will take steps to reign in this abuse of the criminal justice system."

Willacy County has become a prison hub with county, state and federal lockups. Guerra has gone after the prison-politician nexus before, extracting guilty pleas from three former Willacy and Webb county commissioners after investigating bribery related to federal prison contacts.

Another indictment released Tuesday accuses state Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr. of profiting from his public office by accepting honoraria from prison management companies. Guerra announced his intention to investigate Lucio's prison consulting early last year.

Lucio's attorney, Michael Cowen, released a scathing statement accusing Guerra of settling political scores in his final weeks in office.

"Senator Lucio is completely innocent and has done nothing wrong," Cowen said, adding that he would file a motion to quash the indictment this week.

Last month, a Willacy County grand jury indicted The GEO Group, a Florida private prison company, on a murder charge in the death of a prisoner days before his release. The three-count indictment alleged The GEO Group allowed other inmates to beat Gregorio de la Rosa Jr. to death with padlocks stuffed into socks. The death happened in 2001 at the Raymondville facility, just four days before de la Rosa's scheduled release.

In 2006, a jury ordered the company to pay de la Rosa's family \$47.5 million in a civil judgment. The Cheney-Gonzales indictment makes reference to the de la Rosa case.

None of the indictments released Tuesday had been signed by Presiding Judge Manuel Banales of the Fifth Administrative Judicial Region.

A second batch of indictments targeted public officials connected to Guerra's own legal battles.

Willacy County Clerk Gilbert Lozano, District judges Janet Leal and Migdalia Lopez, and special prosecutors Mervyn Mosbacher Jr. — a former U.S. attorney — and Gustavo Garza — a long-time political opponent of Guerra — were all indicted on charges of official abuse of official capacity and official oppression.

Garza, the only one who could be immediately reached Tuesday, called it a sad state of affairs.

"I feel sorry for all of the good people this unprofessional prosecutor has maligned," Garza said. "I'm not at all concerned about the accusations he has trumped up."

Banales dismissed indictments against Guerra last month that charged him with extorting money from a bail bond company and using his office for personal business. An appeals court had earlier ruled that Garza was improperly appointed as special prosecutor to investigate Guerra.

After Guerra's office was raided as part of the investigation early last year, he camped outside the courthouse in a

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borrowed camper with a horse, three goats and a rooster. He threatened to dismiss hundreds of cases because he believed local law enforcement had aided the investigation against him.

On Tuesday, Guerra said the indictments speak for themselves. He said the prison-related charges are a national issue and experts from across the country testified to the grand jury. Asked about the indictments against local players in the justice system who had pursued him, Guerra said, "the grand jury is the one that made those decisions, not me."

The indictments were first reported by KRGV-TV.

Associated Press writer Deb Riechmann in Washington contributed to this report.



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DaleCA wrote:

Texas grand juries are a nationwide joke. And this one sounds loopy from the outset.
11/18/2008 4:51:52 PM

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KojiroVance wrote:

You've got to be kidding. Another political witch hunt by an incompetent Democrat DA. (Wasn't this the same DA who camped out at the courthouse and brought farm animals for his own zoo?)
11/18/2008 4:52:47 PM

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BarryMcCociner wrote:

Let it go. Obama and his regime are assuming power soon. The evil Bush and Cheney will be gone. Let the old men retire in peace. The dead horse doesnt need to be kicked anymore. GWB could have gone after the despicable acts committed by Clinton and they chose to let him go. Have some class.
11/18/2008 5:00:06 PM

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Shermie wrote:

This is so bogus it's a joke!
11/18/2008 4:56:31 PM

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martifr wrote:

Texas Monthly announces that Sen. Eddie Lucio, Jr. was named one of the worst Texas legislators. His nicknames say it all: Sucio ("Dirty") Lucio and El Resbaloso ("the Slippery One"). It appears that Lucio is just another democrat party hack trying to raise his profile by going after government officials who go after illegal aliens.
11/18/2008 5:01:25 PM

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jackolantyrn356 wrote:


Last 4 or 5 times some one in the Republican Party has left office. The Democrats have either tried to put them in jail or have had them investigated to thee "NTH" degree. I'm not sure it's fair. It's so scary the way the Democrayts scurry like little slimy maggots to protect their own like, Harry Reid, or Barney Frank or even the now long remembered Ted Kennedy case..... I'm rathersick of it. Send these to Senator retirement as what the Republicans usually do. Remember Boys, that your rating are ony % points from zero. The election has not helped. The Trading floor took a nose dive with Obama in the soon to be driver's seat.
11/18/2008 10:31:00 PM


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jpmct wrote:
 You folks down there really should stop putting the mentally ill in charge of your judicial system. Don't you all have basket weaving?
11/18/2008 10:22:46 PM
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bowsprit wrote:
 HAHA! If that's all the criminal acts you can pin on Cheney and Gonzales you're not looking very hard...
11/18/2008 10:17:42 PM
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oldude38 wrote:
 The vice-president called for medical help this evening. He was practicing the insertion of a cell phone and things got out of hand.
11/18/2008 10:09:10 PM
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IndianScout101 wrote:
 What a bunch of Bull....I can see this in California, perhaps San Fransico or Berkley, but Texas? What the F... is in the water down there?
11/18/2008 10:02:58 PM
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