

NEWS

Activist Nativio Lopez pleads guilty to voter fraud

By **MARTIN WISCKOL** | mwisckol@scng.com | Orange County Register
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Immigrant-rights activist and former Santa Ana schools trustee **Nativio Lopez** pleaded guilty today to one felony count of voter-registration fraud related to charges that he lived in Santa Ana when he registered to vote in Los Angeles in 2008.

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge **William C. Ryan** sentenced Lopez to three years probation and ordered him to complete 400 hours of community service. Seven remaining felony counts – including perjury, filing a false instrument and fraudulent voting – were dropped by Deputy District Attorney **Ed Miller**.

[Read Bob Dornan's reaction.](#)

It was a tumultuous judicial process, with Lopez jailed twice after conflicts with judges. In March, a judge ordered him to Patton State Hospital. But before Lopez could be sent away, the judge received a revised assessment from a psychiatrist and cancelled the order.



The court went through a series of hearings and evaluations to determine whether Lopez was mentally competent to stand trial, beginning in early 2010 and finally concluding in April that he was indeed able to adequately understand proceedings. Lopez's plea today immediately followed the judge's announcement that jury selection would begin without further delay.

His lawyer had said in mid-2009 that he was nearing a plea deal in the case, but Lopez then fired the lawyer and represented himself in the case.

The indictment, said that in 2008, Lopez, 59, changed his voting address from his Santa Ana home to the Boyle Heights office of Hermandad Mexicana Latinoamericana, a group he heads. He was alleged to have voted in L.A. County despite still living in Orange County.

Lopez also heads the Mexican American Political Association.

A controversial figure among both anti-illegal immigration activists and some community activists, Lopez was recalled in 2003 from his post as school board member after serving six years.

In 1996, Lopez aroused controversy for registering new citizens in the congressional district where Democrat **Loretta Sanchez** upset incumbent **Bob Dornan**, winning by 984 votes.

A congressional House Oversight Committee investigation later found ~~that some voters had cast ballots before their citizenship was finalized.~~ that 748 improper ballots were cast. It found 624 of those were from immigrants who were not citizens, although many were in the process of gaining citizenship.

The Orange County District Attorney's Office investigated allegations that Lopez's primary organization, then known as Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, was responsible for the improper registrations but no charges were filed.

Lopez also ran into difficulties in 2002 over hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal funding received by Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, whose services included citizenship training and English lessons. Prosecutors alleged that Lopez had wrongly used the education grants to pay the mortgage on his headquarters in Santa Ana.

Hermandad Mexicana Nacional agreed to pay a \$600,000 settlement, but did not admit wrongdoing.

