

DEFIANT GARCIA SENTENCED ON CORRUPTION CHARGES

By **TOM PULEO and LYNNE TUOHY; Courant Staff Writers**
THE HARTFORD COURANT

JANUARY 23, 1997

Edwin E. Garcia remained a tough guy to the end.

The former lawmaker and **Hartford police** sergeant was given a year of house arrest Wednesday for political corruption -- and he will wear an ankle bracelet for at least six weeks.

But Garcia never flinched as **Hartford** Superior Court Judge Raymond Norko administered the punishment -- denouncing Garcia as an arrogant, corrupt, paranoid sellout who failed his people "miserably" while hanging out with "slimeballs."

Garcia displayed his well-known cocky style as he left court and faced a row of cameras, refusing to apologize or acknowledge the illegal nature of his drive for votes in a March Democratic town committee race that led to his downfall. He likened himself to **Nelson Mandela**, the president of South Africa and civil rights pioneer.

"As a state representative, I fought hard for my district, very hard," Garcia said. "Remorse? . . . I'm going to hold my head high."

Chief State's Attorney John M. Bailey said apology or not, Garcia in effect admitted guilt by pleading no contest to the three felonies. Garcia also will serve two years of probation and some type of community service. He already has resigned from the **General Assembly** and the police force.

"They go down as guilty pleas," Bailey said. "He may not admit it, but he pleaded guilty to three felonies."

Garcia had faced 86 felony counts, all but one stemming from the absentee ballot scandal in the town committee race in Hartford's 4th House District. A Courant investigation found that Garcia and his workers systematically registered hundreds of young voters and furnished many with absentee ballots that they neither qualified for nor understood. Six Garcia campaign workers still face charges in the criminal case brought after Garcia's foes filed a lawsuit that triggered a joint investigation by Bailey's office and the State Elections Enforcement Commission.

Earlier this month Garcia pleaded to the three felonies in exchange for no jail time and the state's agreement to drop the other 83 counts. Senior Assistant State's Attorney John M. Massameno had called the evidence against Garcia "overwhelming."

At that time, Garcia indicated he would relocate to Florida to avoid house arrest in Connecticut, a scenario that prosecutors initially said they would permit. But he has since changed his mind about leaving the city he grew up in. Garcia remains popular in Hartford's heavily Latino center city, and in fact won a September primary and re-election in November while facing the felony counts.

Although no specific conditions of the house arrest were spelled out in court Wednesday, generally it means that the person must remain at home during the period of the sentence, except to go to work or perform community service. Garcia indicated he would volunteer at a church soup kitchen and start a new job -- said by his lawyer to be in construction. Garcia has said in recent weeks that he has turned his life over to God.

Wednesday's sentencing began on an ironic note. Garcia sat briefly in the back of the courtroom, directly in front of federal undercover agent Angel Plaza.

It was Plaza who, during the course of a food stamp fraud investigation targeting Hartford area grocers, was introduced to Garcia. Plaza was told that Garcia could help him procure a gun permit. Garcia did, then pocketed a \$300 cash contribution Plaza gave him for his assistance. Garcia never reported it on campaign finance forms, which resulted in one of the criminal charges to which he pleaded no contest.

During the sentencing, Assistant State's Attorney Julia Dewey portrayed Garcia as an immature man who has refused to own up to his actions.

"Accept no excuses, your honor -- the defendant became the person that he is," Dewey said. "Not because of persecution but because of arrogance . . . not a public servant striving for the good of the community, but a self-serving criminal to whom power and money were everything."

Garcia, with only two co-defendants appearing in court to offer support, showed no emotion during Dewey's onslaught. The prosecutor asked Norko to impose a five-year probation so Garcia would "no longer act as a cancer in the community he once served."

Norko instead gave Garcia two years' probation--.

But Norko also chastised Garcia, saying he was guilty of "corruption, arrogance, lust for power and, certainly, violating the public trust." Norko called Garcia "paranoid." He also said he "doesn't buy the racial shield" being used by Garcia.

Continuing his tongue-lashing, Norko said Garcia's constituents were "sold down the river," and that the former legislator had squandered his talent and hung out with "slimeballs," who were arrested in the food-stamp case. He asked Garcia to sit in a room, contemplate his life and seek out a new direction.

Garcia grew up in Hartford's Dutch Point housing project and went on to obtain a political science degree from Trinity College and become one of the city's political luminaries before his fall.

"All through this, I've never heard a word of remorse," Norko said. ". . . I don't think you're capable of saying it."

Garcia's attorney, William T. Gerace, acknowledged his client is a complex person.

"Eddie's a difficult guy," Gerace said afterward. "Remorse? I would say Eddie is a blur of emotions right now and he really has to sort through them. He's such a fighter, he gets blinded by his vigor for the fight. I know he's sad for himself and he feels he's been wronged somehow. I don't think he's seeing it in the clear light of day yet.

"Eddie's complex. The same things that are his faults are his assets. He plunges forward. He only knows one speed, and that's full speed," Gerace said. "He's not happy about this, and I predict he'll make a comeback."

Corrections

Clarification published January 25, 1997.* Former Hartford Police Sgt. and state Rep. Edwin E. Garcia pleaded no contest to three felony counts that led to his sentencing Wednesday on charges of absentee ballot fraud, tampering with a witness and accepting an illegal campaign contribution. He did not, contrary to statements made after court by Chief State's John M. Bailey, plead guilty or have his pleas entered as guilty pleas. Judge Raymond Norko pronounced Garcia guilty. Correction published January 24, 1997. Former Hartford police Sgt. and state Rep. Edwin E. Garcia pleaded no contest to three felony counts that led to his sentencing Wednesday on charges of absentee ballot fraud, tampering with a witness and accepting an illegal campaign contribution. He did not, contrary to statements made in a story on Page 1 Thursday by Chief State's Attorney John M. Bailey, plead guilty or have his pleas entered as guilty pleas. Judge Raymond Norko pronounced Garcia guilty.

This 'attr(data-c-typename)' is related to: [Crime](#), [Hartford](#), [Connecticut General Assembly](#), [Hartford Police Department](#), [Nelson Mandela](#)