

Ex-Sunland Worker Gets Probation for Illegal Vote

By Rene Romo / Journal South Reporter

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LAS CRUCES – A former Sunland Park city employee has been sentenced to 18 months of probation after pleading no contest to charges she voted in the border town while living in El Paso.

Priscilla Morales, who was employed for a little more than three months as secretary to the city’s public works director, voted early in the city’s March election after registering to vote using the address of former City Councilor Angelica Marquez, according to police. Morales is a niece of Marquez’s husband.

Morales and Marquez had been scheduled to go to trial Wednesday in the voter fraud case, but Morales entered a plea agreement last week and defense attorneys for Marquez requested a trial postponement. The pair were arrested in early March on identical charges of false voting and conspiracy to commit false voting.

Deputy District Attorney Steven Blankinship said he was satisfied with the sentence imposed on Morales, noting it appeared she became involved in the voting scheme after being approached by, and relying on the advice of, Marquez, who was an authorized voter registration agent.

“She (Morales) wasn’t looking to commit a crime, but was approached by someone in authority,” Blankinship said.

Marquez is a close ally of former City Councilor Daniel Salinas, who is awaiting trial on charges of extortion, bribery, receiving kickbacks and conspiracy.

She resigned her seat on the City Council on Feb. 10 because she planned to run for a county office, as her husband ran for the same seat on a Salinas slate of candidates.

Marquez allegedly approached Morales at a Sunland Park grocery store on Jan. 14 about registering to vote in the March election.

According to a statement given to police, when Morales said her Texas residency prevented her from voting in New Mexico, Marquez allegedly responded that if Morales planned on moving to Sunland Park within four years then she could register to vote.

Morales’ defense attorney did not respond to a call seeking comment.

Besides the false voting case, Marquez also faces trials in two other cases. In an extortion case, Marquez is accused of conspiring with Salinas and others to blackmail a rival candidate into dropping out of the mayoral race or face the release of an embarrassing video showing the candidate getting a lap dance from a topless woman.

In another case, Marquez is accused of conspiring with others to bribe a police officer with a city job offer if he talked his sister into dropping out of a City Council race.

— This article appeared on page C2 of the Albuquerque Journal

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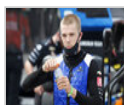
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