

Politiqueras face multiple charges

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The alleged victims of voter fraud perpetrated by Norma Lopez, Cynthia Lopez and Zaida Bueno as listed in the misdemeanor charge filings in Live Oak County Court were also named in handwritten voter rosters collected two years ago from Norma Lopez and Bueno.

The lists were collected as part of the investigation into politiquera activity in the 2008 Primary in Jim Wells County.

Assistant Attorney General William Tatum will prosecute the cases in the Live Oak County Court. Judge Jim Huff will preside over all three cases. All three women will be arraigned in Live Oak County on March 18.

The Attorney General's investigators allege the women knowingly possessed an official ballot or official carrier envelope provided for the purposes of early voting by mail in the March 2008 Primary.

The complaint charge for each defendant is Method of Returned Marked Ballot less than 10, which is a Class B Misdemeanor offense under Texas Election Code punishable by up to 180 days in jail, a \$2,000 fine or both. Under each complaint there are listed multiple counts for each defendant.

According to court filings, Norma Lopez has eight counts under the charge, or eight alleged victims, including Mary Ann Davis, Domitila Paz, Christine Paiz, Anna Benavides, Anna Marie Perez, Alessa Ramirez, Amado Ramirez and Alexis Ramirez.

Seven of the eight alleged victims are also listed in the handwritten roster was collected from Norma Lopez by Attorney General Office investigators.

Norma Lopez said in May 2008 she assisted the Ramirez family with their mail-in ballot applications, and the Paz family, including Domitila Paz, who lives just five blocks from the Ramirez family in Precinct 10. Ramirez family members at the time refused to answer questions concerning their mail-in ballot applications.

Paz said when Lopez came by to pick up her and her husband's ballots, her husband refused. Paz eventually handed her ballot over, after persistent requests made by Norma Lopez, she previously told the Alice Echo-News Journal. Lopez said prior to the ballots, she had handed 50 mail-in ballot applications to Mary Lozano (then-candidate for Tax Assessor Collector), but denied she marked any applications as having come from disabled individuals.

Norma Lopez said she picked up ballots as well, and the ballots were sealed in the carrier envelopes prior to her having received them. She said she refused to hand the ballots over to the candidates, and instead mailed them herself.

"I couldn't give them to nobody. I wanted to be sure that they were put in, so I mailed them myself. That's what I did," Norma Lopez said at the time.

Copies of the carrier envelopes showed Norma Lopez had not signed that she assisted with the ballots, as required by law. Norma Lopez said the 2008 Primary was extremely "dirty." Norma Lopez was also listed as a canvasser on the alleged "Team Martinez," which played a central role in the new election called for the Pct. 1 Justice of the Peace race between Juan Rodriguez Jr. and Guadalupe T. Martinez in June 2008. Norma Lopez said she helped several candidates during the election, political activities she said she had done for years.

Norma Lopez asked to retract her statements after her interview and threatened to sue the Alice Echo-News Journal if they were published.

Cynthia Lopez, also charged in Live Oak County, had three people listed in charges against her, including John Cantu, Aureliano Alfaro and Edna Sanchez. Lopez was an alleged member of "Team Martinez" and testified in the 79th District Court in April 2008 in the trial to determine whether to hold a new election.

Cynthia Lopez said she had worked for Martinez, Armando Barrera and Lozano as a canvasser, but had quit all three by mid-February. She testified she took three mail-in ballot applications to Elida Garza, who was identified at the time as campaign manager for Lozano and a paid worker for Martinez.

Lopez's daughter-in-law, Tracey Lopez, told the Alice Echo-News Journal in April 2008 that Lopez allegedly forged a mail-in ballot application in her stepson's name, marking him as a disabled voter though he was working in the oil field. He denied having any disability. Mark Lopez later recovered his application, which the couple said was in Cynthia Lopez's possession.

Zaida Bueno, the third individual charged in connection to alleged voter fraud, had four alleged victims listed in her charges filed in Live Oak County. Among them were Ruth Rivera, Jesusa H. Arellano, Ricardo Ponce and Concepcion Martinez. All four are listed on the hand written roster collected from Bueno two years ago by Attorney General investigators, alongside more than 150 other names.

Less than a month after the election, Mary Alice Martinez, wife of then Pct. 1 JP candidate Martinez, attempted to stop an interview conducted by an investigator and Zaida Bueno, according to an Alice Police report filed at the time. According to the report, Martinez's wife was banging on the door, asking what Bueno was doing in the interview and said Bueno was being held against her will. Bueno turned over documents to investigators at that time, including her voter notebook, which contained lists of eligible voters she relied upon as part of her politiquera activities, according to investigators.

Following the 2008 Primary, complaints from voters poured in to then-District Attorney Joe Frank Garza's office, including allegations of voters being turned away from the polls because mail-in ballots were counted in their name - despite the residents not having requested one; issues involving citizens handling ballots for other voters; and duplicate mail-in ballot applications received by the elections administrator's office.

After the Primary and the ensuing allegations and trial, a new election was called in both the Pct. 1 Justice of the Peace race between Guadalupe T. Martinez and Juan Rodriguez Jr. and the race between Oswald Alanis and J.C. Perez III for Pct. 3 Commissioner. By: Mauricio Julian Cuellar Jr.

