

Courthouse News Service

Attorney Indicted On Racketeering Charges

By DAVID LEE

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(CN) - A south Texas personal injury attorney has been indicted for his involvement in former state judge Abel Limas' use of his state court as a racketeering enterprise, U.S. Attorney José Angel Moreno announced Thursday.

The seven-count indictment was unsealed Thursday at the initial appearance of Ray Roman Marchan, 54, of Port Isabel, before a federal magistrate judge. Marchan is charged with seven felony counts arising from his alleged involvement in a criminal scheme perpetrated by former 404th Judicial District State Court Judge Abel Limas. Marchan is charged with racketeering in aid of a criminal organization as well as aiding and abetting extortion, in violation of the Hobbs Act, and aiding and abetting a scheme to deprive the citizens of Cameron County of the honest services of an elected official.

According to the indictment, Marchan paid \$5,000 in bribe money to Limas in exchange for favorable rulings in a civil case pending in Limas's court, as well as several payments totaling \$6,200 in return for an ad litem appointment in a personal injury case. In the Limas indictment unsealed earlier this year, Marchan is allegedly Person D.

Marchan faces up to 30 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000 if convicted of deprivation of honest services count while the RICO violation and the Hobbs Act charges carry a maximum punishment of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine if convicted.

Marchan was released on a \$100,000 personal recognizance bond pending trial on the charges.

In addition, bail bondsman Francisco "Pancho" Cisneros, 46, of Brownsville, was indicted Tuesday by a federal grand jury for conspiring to and aiding and abetting the extortion of money from persons with cases pending in former state District Court Judge Abel Corral Limas' court, United States Attorney José Angel Moreno announced.

According to the indictment, Cisneros allegedly transferred bribe money to Limas to change the terms of a defendant's bond from a cash or surety to a personal recognizance bond in a matter pending in his court.

Cisneros faces a maximum prison term of 20 years, a fine of up to \$250,000 and a term of supervised release of up to five years if convicted of either count charged.

In May, personal injury attorney Jose Santiago "Jim" Solis, 47, of Harlingen, pleaded guilty to a one-count criminal information, admitting admitted to helping Limas use his judgeship of the 404th District Court as a criminal enterprise to enrich himself through extortion.

Solis represented District 38 in the Texas House for seven terms before retiring from the Legislature in 2007.

Solis admitted paying Limas \$8,000 in May 2008 in a case involving a helicopter crash at South Padre Island.

As part of his plea agreement, Solis agreed to forfeit \$250,000 to the government. Sentencing is set for August 1.

Assistant United States Attorneys Michael Wynne and Oscar Ponce are prosecuting all three cases.