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In Case You Missed It

Mayhem at Sec. of State's Office Continues

"Republican Dianna Duran, said Thursday the recent developments bring Herrera's leadership and management skills into question."

Herrera Upset Over Misconduct Claims

Albuquerque Journal

By Dan Boyd

Read this online at: <http://www.abqjournal.com/news/state/27232666752newsstate08-27-10.htm>

SANTA FE — New Mexico Secretary of State Mary Herrera lashed out Thursday at one former and two current employees who have gone to the FBI with concerns about possible misconduct on her part, then stormed off without answering reporter questions.

"Blatantly false and ridiculous claims being thrown at the press like red meat in an election year are politically motivated," Herrera said in reference to the employees who have contacted federal law enforcement with "pay-to-play" allegations and possible violations of the state purchasing code and federal election law.

A lawyer for two employees recently placed on paid administrative leave disputed Herrera's claim.

"This is not politically motivated whatsoever," Rudy Martin said of his clients. "(The Secretary of State's Office) is trying to make it look like it's politics so they can hide their tracks."

Martin said public information officer James Flores and office administrator

Manuel Vildasol were placed on administrative leave after they contacted federal authorities.

Herrera, a first-term Democrat who is up for re-election in November, made the comments at the end of a news conference in the lobby of her Capitol North office to announce that voter registration information was being sent out.

She then stormed off without answering questions.

Flores and Vildasol were recently placed on paid administrative leave without explanation. Martin said both employees have spoken to the FBI.

Though Martin declined to discuss details, he said their claims pertain to alleged "pay-to-play" breaches of the state code for handling contracts for outside work and violations of federal election guidelines.

"There are what we believe are violations of federal law," Martin said.

Herrera said the decision to place Flores and Vildasol on administrative leave was made by the office's legal and human resources staff, not by her.

She said an internal probe is being conducted under the state's administrative code.

"Investigations are being conducted that I am not privy to and have no involvement with," Herrera said.

Martin also is representing AJ Salazar, the former bureau of elections director for the Secretary of State's Office, who resigned in February.

Salazar wrote a blistering resignation letter obtained by the Journal in March, in which he accused Herrera of soliciting money from firms that contract with her office and ordering employees to obtain petition signatures for her re-election campaign.

Specifically, Salazar alleged Herrera pushed him to obtain "sponsorships" from firms or businesses to help pay for election seminars for county clerks.

Salazar has spoken with the FBI, Martin said. The FBI doesn't typically discuss pending investigations.

Herrera, a former Bernalillo County clerk, denied Salazar's allegations in March and said Thursday she won't let them become a distraction.

"People can launch whatever attacks they want at me, but that will not change the fact that I am focused and committed just as I always have been on serving the citizens of

New Mexico as their secretary of state...," Herrera said.

Herrera's opponent in the Nov. 2 general election, **Republican Dianna Duran, said Thursday the recent developments bring Herrera's leadership and management skills into question.**

"As with any other New Mexican, I'm concerned when I hear these things," said Duran, a five-term state senator and former Otero County clerk.

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