

## Lies and federal databases

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A scandal involving unauthorized use of a federal crime database that's been brewing in Colorado for four years may have abruptly ended the political careers of Gov. Bill Ritter and his longtime aide, who was nominated by the Obama administration for Denver U.S. attorney.

Last month, Stephanie Villafuerte unexpectedly withdrew her name after the Senate Judiciary Committee's top Republican member, Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., said he expected her to answer the FBI's questions about her role in the affair and under oath.

Democrat Ritter's announcement that he would not run for a second term sent shock waves through a Democratic Party already reeling from retirement announcements the same day by Sens. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., and Chris Dodd, D-Conn.

It also focused renewed attention on Transportation Security Administration nominee Erroll Southers, who gave Congress conflicting reports over his personal use of the same crime database to run unauthorized background checks on his then-estranged wife's boyfriend.

Congressional Republicans are now demanding that Attorney General Eric Holder and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano investigate the firing of former Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent Cory Voorhis for pointing out Ritter's hypocrisy during the 2006 gubernatorial campaign.

As Denver district attorney, Ritter allowed 152 illegal immigrants accused of deportable felonies to plead guilty to lesser charges such as "agricultural trespass." Those pleas allowed them to remain in the country.

Angered that Ritter blamed ICE agents for not removing criminal aliens from the state when he had been releasing them himself, Voorhis then contacted a staff member for Republican Bob Beauprez, who was running against Ritter, and suggested he check Ritter's record on the issue.

Even though Voorhis did not pass on the information himself, he was blamed for a subsequent Beauprez attack ad based on information provided to the Republican's campaign by a private investigator in Texas.

The ad featured Honduran illegal immigrant and heroin dealer Walter Ramo (aka Eugene Estrada and Carlos Roberto Estrada-Medina) whose 2002 plea deal with Ritter allowed him to stay in the United States. Ramo was later arrested in California for sexual assault on a minor.

Only those with access to the National Crime Information Center database would have been able to link Ramo to the California crime. According to the Denver Post, an FBI investigation found that only three people accessed Ramo's record: Voorhis, Houston-based private investigator Kenny Rodgers, and First Assistant DA Chuck Lepley. A phone log belonging to DA spokeswoman Lynn Kimbrough noted that Villafuerte, who was then working on the Ritter campaign before, had called her to ask about Estrada-Medina.

It took a federal jury less than two hours to find Voorhis not guilty of two misdemeanor charges of unauthorized access to the restricted NCIC database, but ICE fired him anyway. The Merit Systems Protection Board, which upholds federal civil service personnel standards, will hear his appeal later this month.

The Denver Post also reported that an April 2009 internal ICE memo said Tony Rouco, Voorhis' supervisor, perjured himself at the trial and made false statements to the FBI. Instead of being fired, Rouco was given a temporary promotion.

"Three people accessed the federal database," Colorado blogger Ross Kaminsky (rossputin.com) told *The Examiner*. "Of the three, the only one whose access was for law enforcement purposes was Cory Voorhis. Two people passed on the information. ... The only one who didn't pass the information was Voorhis, and he was the only one prosecuted."

**Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Colo.**, has asked the Justice Department to investigate Villafuerte but he has not yet received a reply. **Coffman** sent another letter to Napolitano last week asking her to lift the "indefinite suspension" on the still-unemployed Voorhis' security clearance so he can get a job.

Last month, Sessions also asked Napolitano to reopen the investigation into Voorhis' dismissal. DHS agreed to do so. However, a Sessions aide says he has since heard nothing from DHS.

Meanwhile, Voorhis -- a decorated 15-year veteran who has suffered tremendous financial and personal hardship for exposing Ritter's duplicity -- is still twisting in the wind.

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