



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

Johnny Sutton, U.S. Attorney

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MICHAEL MORALES SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON

(Austin, Texas), **United States Attorney Johnny Sutton** announced that 40-year-old **Michael Morales** of San Antonio, Texas, was sentenced today to two years in federal prison for communicating an extortionate threat to the Tony Sanchez for Governor campaign.

“Today's sentence sends a strong message to the community that those who would blackmail others, especially when such conduct has the potential to affect an election, will be punished. Because he engaged in such conduct, Michael Morales will now serve two years in federal prison,” stated **United States Attorney Johnny Sutton**.

In addition to the prison term, United States District Judge Sam Sparks ordered that Morales pay a \$5,000 fine and be placed under supervised release for a period of one year after completing his prison term.

On January 30, 2003, Morales pled guilty to one count of Interstate Communication of an Extortionate Threat, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 875(d). Morales admitted that between October 11 and October 21, 2002, using the alias “Wendel Smith,” he made several telephone calls and sent faxes containing a threat to injure the reputation of Tony Sanchez in an effort to extort \$280,000 from Sanchez and the Sanchez for Governor campaign. Morales informed the Sanchez for Governor campaign that he wanted to be paid a “consulting fee” to keep the information from being disclosed to the news media or to Sanchez’s election opponent. Morales further admitted that all of the phone calls and facsimile transmissions originated from his San Antonio business.

On October 21, 2002, special agents with the Federal Bureau of Investigation executed a search warrant at Morales’ San Antonio business. Items recovered during that search included a document found in Morales’ desk in Morales’ handwriting describing details of the telephone calls in his extortion scheme, a prepaid phone card found in Morales’ wallet used to make the extortion calls to the Sanchez for Governor campaign, and a document of more than 50 pages – eight of which were faxed to the Sanchez for Governor campaign.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with the full cooperation of the Tony Sanchez campaign. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Matthew Devlin.

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