



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

**Robert Pitman, U.S. Attorney**

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February 23, 2012

**FEDERAL GRAND JURY INDICTS EL PASO COUNTY COMMISSIONER AND AN ASSOCIATE  
IN CONNECTION WITH A DRUG TRAFFICKING SCHEME**

**United States Attorney Robert Pitman, DEA Special Agent in Charge Joseph M. Arabit, ICE-HSI Acting Special Agent in Charge Dennis Ulrich, IRS-Criminal Investigation Special Agent in Charge Steve McCullough, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection Chief Patrol Agent Scott A. Luck, El Paso County Sheriff Richard Wiles and El Paso Police Chief Greg Allen** today announced the arrests of El Paso County Precinct 3 Commissioner Guillermo "Willie" Gandara, Jr., age 37, of El Paso, and Juan Canales, age 50, of San Elizario, Texas, on federal drug trafficking and money laundering charges.

A federal grand jury indictment, returned yesterday and unsealed today, charges the defendants with one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute 50 kilograms or more of marijuana and one substantive count of possession with intent to distribute marijuana. The indictment also charges Gandara with three counts of maintaining property for the distribution of marijuana.

The indictment alleges that from November 2010 until the present, the defendants conspired to possess and distribute over 50 kilograms of marijuana using property located at 1000 Coker Road in El Paso County. The indictment also contains a notice of criminal forfeiture whereby the government is seeking to forfeit any and all proceeds derived from their alleged marijuana trafficking operation.

"Elected officials who engage in drug trafficking violate the public trust. As this lengthy investigation attests, DEA and its law enforcement partners are committed to holding drug traffickers accountable for their illegal activity, regardless of their position, and we will not allow the actions of a few to tarnish the honorable work that other government officials perform each day. The residents of El Paso County deserve no less," said Joseph M. Arabit, Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration-El Paso Division.

This morning, federal authorities arrested Canales without incident. DEA and ICE-HSI agents, with assistance from U.S. Border Patrol agents, arrested Gandara last night in Sierra Blanca.

"ICE-HSI, together with our federal law enforcement partners, will continue to stand steadfast and commit our resources to battle drug trafficking organizations as well as target the dangers they pose to public safety and border security," said Dennis A. Ulrich, acting special agent in charge of ICE-HSI El Paso. "This joint investigation has thwarted a criminal enterprise, and illustrates that no member of this community is above the law."

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IRS-CI Special Agent in Charge Steve McCollough commented on the arrest of Gandara and his associates by reminding the public that, "IRS-Criminal Investigation play's a unique role in federal law enforcement's counter-drug effort in that we target the profit and financial gains of narcotics traffickers which comprise a significant portion of the untaxed and illegal underground economy."

Upon conviction, each defendant faces up to 20 years in federal prison per count.

**It is important to note that an indictment is merely a charge and should not be considered as evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.**

This case is being investigated by agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations and the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation together with the U.S. Border Patrol, El Paso Police Department and the El Paso County Sheriff's Department.

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