

Agents' pardon urged of Bush

By Sara A. Carter

Washington Times - November 19, 2007

Top conservatives have joined ranking House leaders in their bid to pressure the president to pardon two Border Patrol agents imprisoned for the nonfatal shooting of a Mexican drug smuggler in El Paso, Texas, in 2005.

In a letter that was delivered today to the White House, 31 major conservative petitioners joined a campaign led by Rep. Duncan Hunter, California Republican and presidential candidate, asking President Bush to pardon Ignacio Ramos and Jose Alonso Compean before Thanksgiving.

The letter comes on the heels of the arrest of admitted drug smuggler Osvaldo Aldrete-Davila on charges of trafficking marijuana while he was profiting from the federal immunity deal as the star witness in the shooting case against the agents.

"History has proven that the mere words and deeds of a president can change the course of history and profoundly affect both the tone and direction of the nation's moral character for generations to come," said the letter signed by 31 petitioners, mostly from Christian conservative groups and national-security organizations.

"The impact of a president's silence can have the same dramatic and devastating results. That is why we find your continued silence on the issue of a presidential pardon for Border Patrol agents Ramos and Compean of great concern," it said.

Ramos and Compean are serving 11 and 12 years, respectively, for the shooting, which occurred in February 2005. They have served nearly a year in solitary confinement for their own protection because of the high profile of their case. The pair is scheduled to appeal the conviction on Dec. 3 before the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans.

The letter is one of more than a dozen attempts — including a petition signed by nearly 400,000 people across the nation — to reach the president. Mr. Hunter hand-delivered a similar letter to the president on Friday.

Some of the first signatures on the long list are conservative stalwarts Paul Weyrich of the Free Congress Foundation, David Keene of the American Conservative Union and Morton

Blackwell of the Leadership Institute. Others include former Reagan administration official Frank Gaffney of the Center for Security Policy and anti-feminist activist Phyllis Schlafly of the Eagle Forum.

The signers say they "find it unacceptable that some disillusioned Americans are being forced to conclude that the lives of Ramos and Compean are simply what the government has deemed an acceptable level of 'collateral damage' for a failed border security and national immigration policy."

Last week, U.S. Attorney Johnny Sutton, whose office prosecuted the case against the Border Patrol agents, announced the arrest of Mr. Aldrete-Davila. He was arrested Thursday at the Zaragoza Bridge in El Paso by agents with the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Department of Homeland Security.

A grand jury indictment charged the Mexican national, who wore body armor on Friday for his arraignment, with conspiracy and possession with intent to distribute marijuana in September and October 2005, officials said.

Federal officials would not disclose details about Mr. Aldrete-Davila's arrest, about how he entered the U.S. through a legal port of entry or about his reason for attempting to cross the border.

Mr. Aldrete-Davila admitted to smuggling drugs in a 2005 immunity deal in the prosecution of the Border Patrol agents' case, but told the jury that convicted Ramos and Compean that he had no idea he was trafficking marijuana in his van and didn't know how to package the drug.

He has entered hospitals in El Paso under federal escort since the October 2006 sentencing of the former agents, eyewitnesses close to the case told The Washington Times.

On Nov. 8, Mr. Aldrete-Davila was at a hospital in El Paso for a pre-operative

appointment for surgery, the eyewitness source said. That source and other El Paso sources have told The Times that the U.S. government has been paying for his medical bills.

Federal authorities, however, denied that Mr. Aldrete-Davila had entered the U.S. under federal escort several times for medical treatment.

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Attack in northwest tribal zone is first under emergency rule

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Border agents' case gets holiday push

Conservatives are seeking pardons for two officers in the shooting a fleeing man who now faces smuggling charges.

By Johanna Neuman,
Los Angeles Times - November 24, 2007

WASHINGTON -- Conservatives expressed bitter disappointment Friday that President Bush did not use the Thanksgiving holiday to pardon two U.S. border agents who have been imprisoned for a year for shooting and injuring a man now accused of drug smuggling.

"We had hoped that President Bush, who was compassionate enough to pardon two turkeys in the Rose Garden, might also have had enough compassion to pardon two law enforcement officers who spent their lives defending us at the border," said Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Huntington Beach).

A group of Christian and evangelical leaders -- including Paul M. Weyrich of the Free Congress Foundation, the Rev. Louis P. Sheldon of the Traditional Values Coalition and David A. Keene of the American Conservative Union -- excoriated Bush, saying his inaction ran counter to compassionate conservatism and Christian values.

"It's unfortunate that the president missed the opportunity to demonstrate his compassion," the group said Friday. "Such an act would have exemplified the fellowship and spirit of the Thanksgiving holiday and put to rest heartfelt concerns over the inhumane treatment of these two agents."

The furor over the conviction and imprisonment of Ignacio Ramos and Jose Alonso Compean has provoked considerable debate: CNN's Lou Dobbs has made it a staple of his immigration coverage and conservative bloggers regularly assailed Bush on the issue.

The White House has said only that Bush would review pardon petitions on a case-by-case basis.

Johnny Sutton, the U.S. attorney for the western district of Texas, has defended the decision to prosecute the border agents. Sutton has said that he did not prosecute law enforcement officials lightly, but that "most agents would say what these guys did was outrageous."

Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have weighed in, saying the case highlights the difficulties of securing the border amid an intense national debate about immigration.

After a Senate Judiciary subcommittee hearing in July, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) called on the president to commute the agents' 11- and 12-year sentences.

"The sentence does not match the crime," she said in a statement, calling the case an example of "prosecutorial overreach" and "a serious miscarriage of justice."

Rep. Duncan Hunter, a Republican from El Cajon who is running for president, has collected 102 co-sponsors, including a handful of Democrats, for a congressional pardon for what he called "the extreme injustice of the case." He called Bush's inaction on Thanksgiving "a real lack of judgment by the White House."

A recent development in the case could further increase pressure on the White House to intervene. The man shot by the officers in February 2005 has been indicted on charges that he brought marijuana into the United States during September and October 2005 -- the very period when he was in the country on a "humanitarian visa" so he could testify against the agents.

"The latest disclosures show that the government knew the alleged drug smuggler was a career criminal," said T.J. Bonner, president of the National Border Patrol Council, a union representing more than 12,000 border agents. "He was their star witness. They portrayed him as a down-on-his-luck kid looking for \$1,000 to pay for his mother's medical care."

Calling the prosecution "disingenuous if not outright deceptive," Bonner said the president's inaction is "a bitter disappointment to a lot of people."

Ramos and Compean were charged with assault with intent to commit murder and with a cover-up. Prosecutors said that on Feb. 17, 2005, Osvaldo Aldrete-Davila led Border Patrol agents on a high-speed chase ending about 120 yards from Mexico, where he abandoned a van with 743 pounds of marijuana and ran for the border.

Compean shot several times and missed, Ramos fired once, hitting Aldrete-Davila in the left buttock but failing to stop his getaway. Then, said prosecutors, Compean hid evidence. Compean and Ramos said they did not believe they hit Aldrete-Davila, so they skipped the paperwork required in all shooting incidents -- a lapse normally punishable by a five-day suspension. They have said they thought Aldrete was armed. In February, 2006, a jury convicted the two agents of tampering with evidence, obstructing justice, violating the wounded man's civil rights and discharging a firearm during a crime of violence, which carries a mandatory minimum 10-year sentence. The two have appealed their conviction, and the appeal is scheduled before the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Dec. 3.

Bonner, of the Border Patrol union, said the case has affected morale among agents.

"Agents have told me they're hesitant to get themselves into situations that could blow up in their faces," he said. "Part of the covenant of a law enforcement job is that you do your job and people above you will be there to defend you against bogus claims."

Critics also are angry at the administration for keeping the two border agents in a medium-security prison that houses a large contingent of drug offenders, meaning Ramos and Compean must be kept in solitary confinement 23 hours a day.

Within a week of entering the federal prison system, Ramos was brutally beaten by several inmates using prison-issued steel-toed shoes after an episode of "America's Most Wanted" featured the case and prisoners recognized Ramos.

Some critics hope the appointment of a new attorney general, Michael B. Mukasey, might prompt a fresh review by the Justice Department. Neither the department nor the White House had any comment Friday about whether a review was underway.

'Pardon Ramos and Compean now!' Long-time Bush friend among 31 leaders signing letter to White House

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By Jerome R. Corsi
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Marine veteran Jim Martin with President Bush

More than 30 conservative leaders, including one of President Bush's long-time friends, have signed a letter urging Bush to pardon imprisoned Border Patrol agents Ignacio Ramos and Jose Compean.

The move follows news that the drug smuggler in the case, Osvaldo Aldrete-Davila, was arrested last week at the Mexican border for alleged drug offenses committed while under immunity to testify as the star witness.

The leaders calling for a pardon include Paul Weyrich, chairman and CEO of the Free Congress Foundation; Phyllis Schlafly, founder and president of Eagle Forum; Morton Blackwell, chairman of the Conservative Leadership PAC; Frank Gaffney, Jr., president of the Center for Security Policy; and David Keene, chairman of the American Conservative Union.

Among the signatories of the letter – to be delivered to the White House today – is U.S. Marine Corps veteran Jim Martin, president of 60 Plus Association, whose ties with Bush go back to 1968.

In 1968, Martin gave the young George W. Bush his first job out of college, hiring him to work in the successful senatorial campaign of Florida Republican Edward Gurney.

In 1968, Gurney's campaign manager, Jimmy Allison, suggested to Martin that Bush, then graduating from Yale and finishing his service as a pilot with the Texas Air National Guard, could assist Martin in managing the media team.

Martin frequently quips that he gave Bush his first job, working in the campaign as Martin's driver.

At the White House, Martin is fondly known as "The Buddha," a nickname Bush coined that goes back to their 1968 association in Florida.

Ramos and Compean are in solitary confinement in federal prisons serving 11- and 12-year terms respectively for shooting Aldrete-Davila as he fled across the border on foot after bringing 750 pounds of marijuana across the Texas border.

The letter chides Bush for being silent and inactive toward previous calls for him to pardon Ramos and Compean.

"We sincerely feel that your inaction and lack of immediacy to personally address the inhumane treatment of these two agents runs counter to the tenets of a compassionate conservative and the Christian values that many of your supporters find a sustaining beacon of your presidency," the letter said.

The leaders focus on moral concerns, choosing not to argue legal points. The principal concern is that the border agents' lives are at risk in their continuing incarceration.

WND was the first to report in February that Ramos was beaten by inmates after he was placed in the general prison population at the Federal Correctional Complex in Yazoo City, Miss. Since then, the two men have been placed in solitary confinement to prevent further attacks by inmates. The conservative letter objects, arguing the solitary confinement Ramos and Compean have endured now for 10 months represents "an inhumane treatment and gross injustice that is worse than the terrorists and enemy combatants receive at Guantanamo Bay."

WND has reported charges by Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Calif., that terrorists at Guantanamo Bay have more privileges, including communal living, generous food privileges, ample exercise time and showers, while Ramos and Compean are being detained in concrete slab solitary confinement maximum security cells with no food or reading privileges, one hour per day allowed for exercise, and only three showers weekly and none on the weekend.

At one point, Ramos reportedly lost 30 or more pounds, and his family was concerned he was not receiving needed medications. The letter from the leaders charged Bush's inactivity on the Ramos and Compean case has placed in doubt his administration's commitment to border security.

"As Ramos and Compean sit in solitary confinement 23 out of 24 hours every day," the letter continued, "the failure to personally intercede on their behalf sends a chilling message to other Border Patrol agents and law enforcement officers who will now question their own professional judgment, mute their response and make our borders less secure."

The letter contrasted the immunity given Aldrete-Davila and the harsh punishment inflicted upon the Border Patrol agents. "When an admitted illegal alien drug smuggler who repeatedly brings drugs into this country is given government immunity to testify against the very law enforcement officers hired to stop him," the letter stressed, "the American public sees the scales of justice tilting the wrong way."

The letter calls upon Bush "to demonstrate your compassion and willingness to forgive" and immediately consider pardoning Ramos and Compean.

Demos Chrissos, president of RapidResponse Media, a Washington, D.C.-based political consulting firm, drafted the letter and obtained the signatures. Chrissos is known for producing a TV-radio media campaign, "Pardon the Agents," aimed at freeing Ramos and Compean. Chrissos also produced the "Where's the Fence?" TV spots for Grassfire.org. Recently Chrissos formed the National Voters Alliance, a grassroots organization aimed at focusing attention on the integrity of U.S. elections.

(WND listed the 31 signatories at the end of the article)