


Biscayne Building
19 West Flagler St., Suite 220
Miami, FL 33130
Phone: (305) 375-1946
Fax: (305) 579-2656
www.miamidadeig.org

**Office of the Inspector General
Miami-Dade County**

Memorandum

To: The Honorable Carlos Alvarez, Mayor
The Honorable Chairperson Joe Martinez
Members, Board of County Commissioners

From:  Christopher Mazzella
Inspector General

Date: September 27, 2005

Re: Arrest of Candidate for Campaign Financing Fraud

Attached is a news release relating to the arrest of Jorge Roque (Roque) in connection with fraud regarding the August 31, 2004 Miami-Dade County Commission race for the District 13 seat, currently held by the Honorable Commissioner Natacha Seijas. Roque ran unsuccessfully for the District 13 seat.

Thus far, the joint investigation by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the State Attorney's Office (SAO) of the Roque Campaign has resulted in the arrests of City of Hialeah Councilwoman Vanessa Bravo, Roque's sister-in-law, Rita Picazo, and Hialeah Mayoral candidate, Nilo Juri. All have been charged with providing indirect contributions to the Roque campaign which enabled it to receive \$75,000 from the County's Campaign Trust Fund. Both Picazo and Bravo have been sentenced for their role in this scheme.

Roque was arrested today for indirect contributions to his own campaign, grand theft and solicitation of perjury in an attempt to keep investigators and prosecutors from discovering the indirect contributions. The cases resulting from the Roque Campaign fraud highlight weaknesses in the current Campaign Trust Fund legislation and the importance of the actions currently underway by the Board of County Commissioners to reform this legislation.

cc: Mr. George Burgess, County Manager
Ms. Alina Hudak, Assistant County Manager
Mr. Murray Greenberg, County Attorney
Mr. Lester Sola, Supervisor of Elections
Ms. Cathy Jackson, Director, Audit & Management Services

Clerk of the Board (Copy Filed)



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

NEWS RELEASE

The Miami-Dade County Office of the Inspector General (OIG), the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office (SAO) and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) announced today the arrest of Jorge Roque, the unsuccessful candidate to the Miami-Dade County Commission District 13 seat, during the 2004 elections. Roque was charged with one count of Limitations on Contributions, a third degree felony, one count of Grand Theft second degree, and four counts of solicitation to Commit Perjury in an Official Proceeding, third degree felonies. This is the fourth criminal prosecution resulting from the joint investigation involving the Roque Campaign.

The investigation commenced shortly before the 2004 election when the OIG was alerted to irregularities in the Roque Campaign's contributors list submitted to obtain County Campaign Trust Fund (Trust Fund) monies. The County awards funds to any candidate in a contested election for a County Commission or Mayoral seat who meets certain eligibility criteria. The investigation has uncovered that the Roque Campaign committed fraud to obtain County funds. To date, Roque's sister-in-law, Rita Picazo, Vanessa Bravo and Nilo Juri have been charged with providing indirect contributions to the Roque Campaign in the names of friends and family. These contributions allowed the Roque Campaign to meet the eligibility requirements to receive \$75,000 from the Trust Fund.

Rita Picazo and Vanesa Bravo have been sentenced for their part in the scheme to obtain Trust Fund monies. As part of her plea, Vanessa Bravo resigned her post as Councilwoman for the City of Hialeah. Nilo Juri is currently pending trial on the indirect contribution charges as well as charges of solicitation of perjury stemming from his attempt to thwart the investigation by requesting that the alleged contributors lie to investigators and prosecutors.

Roque, a current candidate to the City of Hialeah Council, surrendered this morning to investigators following a warrant issued for his arrest. According to the affidavit filed by Special Agents of the OIG, Roque provided the funds that allowed his sister-in-law Picazo to reimburse co-workers in an effort to obtain additional contributors. Roque also purchased money orders, which he gave to his sister-in-law for the alleged contributors to fill out with their personal information. Additionally, Roque was charged with solicitation to commit perjury for his part in seeking that the contributors lie to prosecutors and investigators regarding the phony contributions.

Inspector General Christopher Mazzella stressed the importance of maintaining strong oversight and vigilance of campaign financing programs paid for by taxpayers to prevent future transgressions as those detected in the Roque Campaign. "When you plot to violate campaign finance laws, you plot to violate the trust of the people", said State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle. "Such actions are not technical campaign errors but deliberate self-created crimes. Only honest campaigns yield honest public servants."

The investigation into further improprieties associated with the Roque Campaign's application for the County's Campaign Trust Fund monies continues.

Media Opportunity – Inspector General Mazzella will be available for a media opportunity today between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m. at the Office of the Inspector General.