

Free Ramsey Muñiz. Was it a Set Up?

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Federal Prisoner #40288-115, serving life without parole, doesn't look like much. He should turn 75 this year, but in his frail condition he may not live until his December birthday. According to his family, he suffers from COPD and some degree of heart failure. He has been incarcerated since 1994, although he never killed, robbed, attacked or raped anyone.

Yes, he's inmate 40288-115 now, however forty-five years ago, in 1972, he was ascribed a different number; 214,118. That's how many Texans voted for a young, Ramiro "Ramsey" Muñiz as their La Raza Unida candidate for governor. That equaled 6.3 percent of the total; Republican Henry Grover got just under 45 percent, losing to Democrat Dolph Briscoe, who became governor with 48.8 percent.

Now, 45 years after that election, Mr. Muñiz celebrates his own 23rd anniversary at the Federal Correctional Facility in Beaumont, Texas. Muñiz, a college football star and a Baylor law graduate, received his life sentence under the "three-strikes-you're-out" statute, which in his case was for violation of drug laws.



His supporters and a law partner I interviewed swear that he was set up. After all, he had a promising career and was active in the in the "Model Cities" initiative, Head Start and drop-out prevention programs. He always advocated for youth and education. Possessing large quantities of marijuana and cocaine doesn't jibe with this, but he was convicted three separate times.

Was he guilty?

According to a Texas Criminal Justice Policy Council Report, the average time served for conviction of an aggravated violent offense in 1994 was 5.85 years. Non-violent offenders served less — an average of 3.74 years. In other words, of the majority of 1994 convicts,

even violent offenders, were free by 2000.

Society is safe from Muñiz. Further prison is cruel and a waste of our money. I never voted for Muñiz for governor, yet I acknowledge his place in history. Furthermore, if you're an Hispanic politician, whether Democratic or Republican, Ramsey Muñiz is your forerunner. He organized Hispanic voters with a passion in a way no one else had done before or has done since. We all owe him.

President Trump has created antipathy among many Hispanics. Wouldn't Muñiz's release assuage some of those wounds and bad feelings? The president has an excellent opportunity to show compassion towards drug offenders and to trump President Obama, who could and should have included Muñiz on his long list of pardoned non-violent drug offenders.

Irma Muñiz, an educator, has stuck by her husband since they met in 1982. She constantly campaigns for his release. Let Ramsey Muñiz out of prison to live his remaining days with his family and those who have waited, oh so long.

This really isn't about politics. It's about time.

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