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Chihuahua Governor wins Release of Funds from Finance Ministry

by Carlos Navarro

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In what some consider a major victory for state rights and the fight against corruption in Mexico, Chihuahua Gov. Javier Corral scored a victory against the federal government after the finance ministry (Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, SHCP) agreed to release 900 million pesos (US \$47.8 million) in scheduled disbursements to the state government.

Corral, a member of the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), had accused the SHCP of withholding federal allocations to Chihuahua as punishment for his state's move to charge a former official of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) with corruption ([SourceMex, Jan. 17, 2018](#)).

After traveling to Mexico City and other states to make his case, the Chihuahua governor met with Interior Secretary Alfonso Navarrete Prida. Without admitting that funds were withheld for political reasons, Navarrete directed the SHCP to release the money.

"The excuses offered by the SHCP for not turning over the money in a timely manner, before the end of 2017, were truly without basis," columnist María Marván Laborde wrote in the daily newspaper *Excélsior*.

Corral told reporters that a portion of the funds would be used to make a payment on a loan and other obligations that the state incurred last year.

Some observers noted that the decision might have been made for pragmatic reasons.

"The release of the 900 million pesos (which go to the Chihuahua state treasury and not the pockets of the governor) to help ease a financial crisis left by former Gov. César Duarte Jáquez [2010-2016], ends the possibility that the case would end up in the Supreme Court (Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, SCJN)," human rights activist Alfredo Lecona wrote in a guest piece in the online news site *Aristegui Noticias*.

According to Lecona, the program under which SHCP funds are allocated to states under Line 23 (Ramo 23) gives governors broad discretion on how to spend the money. "This discretion allowed César Duarte to divert the funds for electoral purposes to benefit his party [the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional]," Lecona said.

"It is also true that without the public demands by Corral, the issue [of discretion by governors to divert funds] would be exactly where it was before June 8, without a public platform," said the activist.

And writing in *Excélsior*, columnist Humberto Musacchio noted, "Navarrete Prida decided to end the conflict, not because he believed that the complaint of the PAN governor was justified, but because Corral's caravan and the constant coverage of his statements were hammering the federal government."

Musacchio pointed out that by deciding to seek an accommodation with Corral, Navarrete showed great political skill despite his short time on the job. Navarrete replaced Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong at the Interior Ministry (Secretaría de Gobernación, SEGOB) in January ([SourceMex, Jan. 24, 2018](#)).

Extradition requested for former governor

In addition to obtaining the release of the funds, the Corral administration managed to secure a commitment from the federal government to seek the extradition and prosecution of former Gov. Duarte, who is believed to have fled to El Paso, Texas.

In late January, the attorney general's office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) revealed an extradition request had been made for Duarte. Earlier in the week, the PGR said nearly a dozen allegations of corruption, electoral infractions and other crimes have been made against the former Chihuahua governor.

According to various media reports, Duarte owns at least three homes in El Paso, together worth more than US\$1 million.

"One property located in the exclusive residential complex of The Retreat at Sky Island has been valued by El Paso County at about US\$500,000," said the daily newspaper El Heraldo de Chihuahua.

Authorities in Chihuahua have seized several properties in the state belonging to Duarte. The most recent was a 30,000-hectare ranch in the municipality of Camargo, for which Duarte paid a reported 60 million pesos (US\$3.2 million).

The Mexican government did request a red notice from Interpol for Duarte in early 2017 ([SourceMex, April 5, 2017](#)). A red notice is a request to locate and provisionally arrest an individual pending extradition

Some analysts suggested that President Enrique Peña Nieto's administration has been dragging its feet in moving forward with Duarte's extradition. "The process has been surprisingly slow on the part of the federal government," Marván Laborde wrote.

At least one other PRI official connected with a portion of the Duarte case has been taken into custody. In December 2017, authorities in Chihuahua detained Alejandro Gutiérrez, a high-level PRI official, and accused him of diverting to the party's electoral efforts 250 million pesos (US\$13.3 million) that were earmarked for education.

Duarte is one of three former PRI governors to have recently fled Mexico to avoid facing charges of corruption. Javier Duarte de Ochoa of Veracruz, who is not related to César Duarte, went into hiding in October 2016 ([SourceMex, March 1, 2017](#), and [April 5, 2017](#)); he was captured in Guatemala in April 2017 and eventually extradited to Mexico ([SourceMex, April 19, 2017](#)). According to media reports, Duarte de Ochoa had also been linked to real estate investments in the US, including a house in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Roberto Borge Angulo, who was governor of Quintana Roo from 2011 to 2016, was detained in Panama in June 2017 as he attempted to board a plane for Paris ([SourceMex, June 21, 2017](#)). While in Panama, Borge initially fought extradition but eventually agreed to return to Mexico to face trial ([SourceMex, Oct. 11, 2017](#)).

Other PRI governors have fled the country to avoid facing charges of corruption, including Tomás Yarrington Ruvalcaba of Tamaulipas (1999-2005) and Humberto Moreira of Coahuila (2005-2011).

Yarrington was detained in Italy and extradited to Mexico in 2017 ([SourceMex, April 19, 2017](#)). Moreira, for his part, traveled to Spain on the pretext of furthering his education. He was detained by Spanish authorities in 2016 ([SourceMex, Jan. 27, 2016](#)), but was later allowed to return to Mexico on his own accord, in what was suspected to be an arrangement between the Mexican and Spanish governments ([SourceMex, March 9, 2016](#)).

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