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### State judge guilty on three charges

By Ramon Bracamontes / El Paso Times  
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This courtroom sketch shows state judge Manuel Barraza, center, on Wednesday in district court flanked by his lawyers Mervyn Mosbacker, background, and Ken Del Valle during Barraza's trial for fraud and making a false statement to a federal agent. Barraza was found guilty on three charges Thursday. He faces up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine on each of the fraud convictions and up to three years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for the false statement charge. (Nacho L. Garcia Jr. / El Paso Times)

EL PASO -- Stoic and seemingly more concerned about his family than himself, state judge Manuel Barraza politely sat and listened Thursday as jurors found him guilty of devising a scheme to receive sex and money for a judicial ruling.

The only words Barraza spoke were "yes, sir," and they were in response to a series of orders and lectures from U.S. District Court Judge Frank Montalvo.

"Be prepared to go to prison on April 28," Montalvo told Barraza.

"My intention was to remand you to the custody of the U.S. Marshals today," he said. "Your lawyers recommended that I not remand you because of the complexity of the case and because of appeals."

Montalvo paused, then continued with a lecture.

"You will not discuss this case with anyone, not your family, not the press, not anyone. If you do, I will revoke your bond."

Barraza, 54, has been free on bond since FBI agents arrested him in April 2009. A grand jury indicted him on two counts of wire fraud, one count of mail fraud and one count of making a false statement to a federal agent.

The jury of six women and six men convicted Barraza of both counts of wire fraud and lying to a federal officer. They

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acquitted him of mail fraud. Their deliberations lasted a bit more than five hours over two days.

Barraza faces up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine on each of the fraud convictions, and up to three years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for the false statement charge. Montalvo left no doubt that he would sentence Barraza to prison.

During a break that came moments after the verdict was read, Barraza did what he could to comfort his shaken family. Upon adjournment, he left the courthouse by himself. He did not speak to anyone outside.

John Barraza, his brother, said the judge was most concerned about his family.

"He told us not to worry, that everything would be OK, that this was just part of the process," John Barraza said.

His father, Manuel Barraza Sr., would only say that everything was all right. The rest of the Barraza family left the courthouse without talking to outsiders.

Barraza's lawyers did not want to talk about the specifics of the trial.

"Obviously we are disappointed with the verdict," said Ken Del Valle, one of Barraza's lawyers. "That's all I can say."

Mervyn Mosbacker, Barraza's lead attorney, would not say if they would appeal.

"It was a fair process. We can't complain about the process in any way," Mosbacker said.

Barraza's trial took almost three weeks. Prosecutors called 13 witnesses and played 15 audio and video recordings to prove that Barraza tried to influence a drug defendant's case by moving it into his courtroom.

The audio and video recordings shown to the jurors were perhaps the strongest part of the prosecution's case. Two videos showed Barraza accepting more than \$5,000 in cash from a woman who visited him in his judicial office early last year.

She was Sarai Valencia, 24, whose sister was in jail on a cocaine charge. Barraza years earlier had represented the sister, Diana Rivas Valencia, in a different drug case. He succeeded then in getting the charges against her dismissed.

Accused of possession of two kilos of cocaine, Rivas Valencia wanted his help again. This time, though, Barraza was a sitting judge who could not legally represent defendants in criminal cases. Rivas Valencia testified that Barraza said he would help her if she paid him and found women willing to have sex with him.

In one of the videos, Sarai Valencia delivered the money to Barraza as though it came from her and her family. The cash payments, for \$3,800 and \$1,300, actually were provided by the FBI.

Jurors were never told that Sarai Valencia had a prostitution conviction. Montalvo ruled that her past was irrelevant to the case against Barraza.

In his defense, Barraza's attorneys characterized him as an efficient and hard-working judge who had just taken office in January 2009 when the FBI set out to derail his career.

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