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Roddy Stinson: 'General Abbott' wasn't 'AWOL,' his communications director says

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<http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/columnists/rstinson/stories/MYSA062807.1B.rstinson.33ac b70.html>

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott has *not* been AWOL.

I know this because it says so right here in a letter from Abbott's "communications director," Angela Hale:

"Roddy, I want to address several issues with your (June 24) column:

"1. To say that General Abbott was AWOL on this issue is completely inappropriate and most importantly not true."

"This issue" is a violation of the state's right-to-work law.

Quick recap of the story that's causing the stir:

Last June, an El Paso security guard, Juan Vielma, was suspended from his job at a federal immigration and Customs center because he refused to join a union. He was without pay and benefits while he battled his employer and the union over whether the center was a federal "enclave" and not subject to Texas' right-to-work law.

His only ally during the ordeal has been the Virginia-based National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, which provided him with legal assistance after Attorney General Abbott declined to do so.

Vielma's courage was rewarded earlier this month when an administrative law judge ruled the El Paso center was not a federal enclave and therefore Vielma did not have to join the union.

In announcing the ruling, the right-to-work foundation issued a June 18 statement in which it accused Abbott of being "AWOL" while Vielma fought his lonely battle.

So in the interest of keeping the record straight ...

I did not say Greg Abbott was "AWOL" when a Texas worker needed him. The charge was made by the one and only group that has aided that worker.

And late last week, the foundation, in a letter to its supporters, repeated its charge that "Greg Abbott is reluctant to take action" while union bosses "are thumbing their noses at Texas' Right to Work law."

And:

"Foundation attorneys first brought violations to the attention of the Attorney General's office seven months ago. Yet, as of today, no enforcement action has been taken."

Back to Hale's chiding letter:

"2. We have been investigating this issue since January, in cooperation with Right to Work. Unfortunately, rather than calling this office and letting us know they were unhappy with the pace of the investigation, they chose to unfairly attack the attorney general."

OK, lambkins, you now have each side's version of the "issue." You make the call.

My tendency is to believe the story told by the group that stood shoulder to shoulder with Juan Vielma.

"3. Under federal law, the state's right-to-work laws do not apply if the place of employment is on federal property and declared a federal enclave. This is complicated legal stuff, but I would be happy to explain further."

One can almost hear the "sniff" at the end of that sentence. This "legal stuff" is just too "complicated" for a mere newspaperman to understand.

Thanks to the right to work foundation, Juan Vielma had somebody to help him successfully deal with those "complications" after Abbott and his staff left him to twist slowly in the Big Labor wind.

"4. As soon as the ruling happened, the attorney general took swift action ...

(and) sent out demands to the employer and the union to turn over all audited financial statements, details of how they use their union dues and numerous other documents.

"This demand for documents, our investigation and our ongoing legal actions have resulted in the employer rehiring Mr. Vielma and secured his back pay."

To which I say:

Day late, "swift action" short.

"5. This is only the beginning of our investigation. This is an issue we take seriously."

But only after the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation has done all of the heavy lifting and Juan Vielma has done all of the sacrificing.

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