

**Prominent local Hispanic deported Cecilia Velazquez, a Mexican, published a Spanish-language paper. An immigration judge ordered her to leave the U.S. in 2004, and her appeals were rejected.**

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## **Body**

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One of the St. Louis area's most visible **Hispanic** entrepreneurs was **deported** to Mexico on Friday as an illegal immigrant.

**Cecilia Velazquez**, 36, is publisher of Red Latina, a **Spanish-language** newspaper, and president of Radio CuCui, a group that brings ethnic performers and commentators to WEW-AM radio.

**Velazquez** had been in the **United States** since December 2000. Her **deportation** ended a five-year legal battle over her status.

"I'm devastated," **Velazquez** said from her cell phone, as she stood in Juarez, Mexico, an hour after being escorted back into her homeland. "No doubt they used me as an example."

Authorities arrested her April 7 outside her home in north St. Louis County. She was jailed for one week before being bused to Kansas City early Friday for a flight to El Paso, Texas.

Shortly after 5 p.m. Friday, a bus took her halfway across a bridge leading into Mexico, and she was escorted on foot into Mexico, said Carl Rusnok, spokesman for the **U.S. Immigration** and Custom Enforcement agency. Laws forbid her from re-entering this country for 10 years, Rusnok said.

**Velazquez's** arrest came two days before last Sunday's big rally on behalf of immigrants that drew thousands to the Old Courthouse in St. Louis.

"I have been working so hard in the **United States** all these years, helping my people, paying my taxes, being a good person," **Velazquez** said. "I want to come back, of course."

Her attorney, Raymond R. Bolourtchi, said her departure "can only hurt and damage the **Hispanic** community. She was their voice."

**Velazquez** originally was stopped in Houston after entering the **United States** with a visitor's visa on Dec. 27, 2000. Officials who questioned her then determined she was "actually an intending immigrant," Rusnok said, and she given two weeks to return to Mexico.

She didn't and was arrested in 2003 in St. Louis. An **immigration judge** issued a final **order** in **2004** for her to **leave** the country. After losing an **appeal** to the Board of **Immigration Appeals**, she petitioned the 8th **U.S.** Circuit Court of **Appeals**, but lost that round in August.

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Politicians -- including U.S. Sen. Jim Talent and U.S. Reps. William Lacy Clay Jr. and Russ Carnahan -- wrote letters of support for Velazquez. Carnahan's letter, for example, noted that Velazquez "demonstrated a lot of community service," said Carnahan spokesman Glenn Campbell. But those letters, Campbell said, came late in the legal process.

Velazquez said she thought those heavy-hitters would have staved off her deportation. "All the big guys were trying to get a special deal for me," she said.

'It's unfortunate'

Word about her deportation quickly spread Friday among her friends and business acquaintances.

"It's awful for her, it's unfortunate, no matter what her status was," said Lydia Padilla, president of TRC Staffing Services in St. Louis, which places Spanish-speaking workers with area employers. "I did not know her legal status, but what I do know is she donated lots of time and money to needy causes."

Padilla said Red Latina, with its offices on Cherokee Street, is the most respected paper in the Hispanic community, and the only local paper that is 100 percent Spanish. "Red Latina" means Latin network. Padilla advertises in the newspaper. She said Velazquez conducted a toy drive for children every Christmas.

Late last month, Velazquez told a Post-Dispatch reporter that people would approach her -- because of her control over the Hispanic newspaper and radio program -- to help them organize as Congress attempts to deal with the 12 million illegal immigrants now in the country. She said she didn't want to be a social activist.

"I'll spread the word, but that's all," Velazquez said at the time. "I don't want to damage my own case."

Her fiancée, Andrew Jones, said Velazquez was "probably one of the most recognizable Hispanic people in the city -- in the top 20 at least, if not the top five," he said. "We can't even go to the grocery store without people asking for her autograph."

After arriving in Juarez, Velazquez said she booked a flight to go to Mexico City to stay with her parents.

## Graphic

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PHOTO

PHOTO - Velazquez Back in Mexico

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