



Trump's target

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Donald Trump's penchant for bluster and picking fights was a highlight of his successful presidential campaign. Although he promised to be "more presidential" if elected, his battles with various dragons, whether real or perceived, haven't abated at all.

It appears that one of the latest people to appear in his crosshairs is a Rio Grande Valley state legislator.

Meeting Tuesday with members of the National Sheriff's Association, Trump asked the group how he could help them. Sheriff Harold Eavenson of Rockwall County, near Dallas, complained that a state senator had introduced a bill that would require a conviction before government agencies can seize a person's assets.

"Who's the state senator?" Trump asked. "Want to give his name? We'll destroy his career."

Some news outlets reported the president's words as a joke, others didn't. The trouble with Trump is, we just don't know.

What we do know that while Eavenson didn't name the subject of his complaint, two senators have offered such legislation: Konni Burton, R-Colleyville, and Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, D-McAllen. The sheriff later told The Dallas Morning News that he was talking about a man. That leaves Hinojosa, an effective and popular legislator who needn't worry about such a threat.

Interestingly, Burton has issued a statement saying she could be the target, and that she "will not be discouraged" by Trump's threats. Pennsylvania state Sen. Daylin Leach, who has fought for asset seizure reform in his state, also responded with profanity-laced a tweet to the president, daring him to "try to destroy my career"

Such is the tenor of this presidency, where becoming his enemy apparently is a badge of honor.

And we're only three weeks into his term.

But we also know that asset forfeiture laws need review. Currently, government agencies don't need criminal convictions to seize assets they claim were bought with illicit money or used for

illegal purposes. People have lost businesses, cash, even their homes and cars, although they never were convicted of crimes. Many times charges have been dropped after a person agreed not to fight the asset seizure.

This amounts to punishment without conviction, and has led to allegations that some local government entities use the practice to rake in money, or capture desired property.

Sen. Hinojosa is only one of many who believe the practice is unfair, and want to see convictions before people lose their property.

They're hardly alone. A recent Cato Institute/YouGov survey found that 84 percent of those polled oppose civil asset forfeiture laws as they currently exist. Most of them said any seized assets should go to the state general fund, to reduce the temptation for local departments to fill their coffers with seized assets.

The system does need review, and Sen. Hinojosa is right to bring it before his fellow lawmakers.

He and his colleagues should ignore the president's threats, and give the issue the attention it needs.