

Text of Gaertner press release as provided by Friends of the RNC8:

December 17, 2008

Statement of Ramsey County Attorney Susan Gaertner Concerning the Prosecution of Eight Individuals on Riot and Criminal Damage to Property Charges in connection with the Republican National Convention

My office is charged with protecting the public safety in Ramsey County while respecting individual rights by enforcing our state's criminal laws effectively and fairly.

Every day, law enforcement officers present cases to our prosecutors, and those prosecutors determine if criminal charges are warranted based on the facts presented to them, and on the law.

That is exactly what they did in the cases of the eight individuals who have been charged with conspiracy to commit second-degree riot and first-degree criminal damage to property during the Republican National Convention in St. Paul in September 2008.

Contrary to the assertions of some individuals supporting them, the defendants are not being singled out for prosecution for political reasons, or to silence the free speech we all cherish. Plain and simple, they face these charges because they broke laws that apply to them, and to all others, equally.

Thousands of their fellow citizens peacefully made their voices heard during the convention. There is real evidence, however, that a few individuals committed crimes intended to interfere with others' ability to exercise their First Amendment rights free of violence.

The evidence shows that these defendants, rather than being victims of oppression, planned to deprive others both inside and outside the convention hall of their free speech rights through acts of violence.

We would not be fulfilling our duties as prosecutors if we did not bring, or now dropped, charges against such individuals when we believe the evidence shows, beyond a reasonable doubt, that they have violated criminal laws that apply to all of us.

My office will continue to prosecute these cases as we would any other cases - fairly and without favor.