

ROLLING STONE FACES INTERVIEW CRITICISM

NEW YORK: It was a big scoop, and one Rolling Stone may well regret. The magazine made stunning news over the weekend by revealing that actor Sean Penn landed a rare interview last fall with the notorious drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman while Guzman was on the run after escaping through a tunnel from a maximum-security Mexican prison.

Guzman was recaptured Friday in Mexico after a shootout that killed five of his associates and wounded one marine. Penn's long and often rambling essay, widely mocked on social media, included comments from Guzman on everything from his childhood to his thoughts on the drug trade.

It also raised questions of ethics and judgment, namely whether Penn should have met secretly with one of the world's most-wanted fugitives, whether the actor crossed the line by giving Guzman approval over the article before it was published, and whether Penn trivialized El Chapo's murderous past by asking him such questions as "Do you have any dreams?" and "If you could change the world, would you?"

A Rolling Stone spokeswoman did not immediately return requests for comment. Penn's story ran nine months after Rolling Stone retracted its discredited story about a gang rape at a fraternity party at the University of Virginia. The magazine was strongly criticized for

relying too strongly on the account of the alleged victim and failing to carry out basic fact-checking.

It is being sued for tens of millions of dollars by the fraternity, former frat members and a university administrator. Writing for Rolling Stone, Penn acknowledged that Guzman was granted prior approval over the article (Guzman requested no changes, according to the actor), a violation of the commonly held rules of journalistic integrity.

'Discredits the entire story'

"Allowing any source control over a story's content is inexcusable. The practice of pre-approval discredits the entire story - whether the subject requests

changes or not," Andrew Seaman, chairman of the ethics committee of the Society of Professional Journalists, said in a blog post titled "Rolling Stone Gathers No Accolades." "The writer, who in this case is an actor and activist, may write the story in a more favorable light and omit unflattering facts in an attempt to not be rejected."

Penn, an Oscar-winning actor who played a drug dealer in the 1985 movie "The Falcon and the Snowman," has had news-making encounters in other countries. In 2002, as the US was threatening war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Penn visited the country and met with senior officials. He has also spoken with such foreign critics of the US as Fidel

Castro and Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez. Rolling Stone has long mixed aggressive investigative and political reporting with coverage of rock stars and other celebrities. Former staff writers such as Greil Marcus and Jim DeRogatis have accused publisher Jann Wenner of allowing undue input from interview subjects or interfering with music reviews he found too negative about artists he likes. "It's unfortunately in keeping with Jann's tendency to ignore professional scruples in an effort to curry favor with celebrities," said Robert Draper, a correspondent for GQ and author of "Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History," said of the El Chapo story. — AP

RUBIO SHIFTS IMMIGRATION FOCUS TO NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS

BEDFORD: Marco Rubio is increasingly portraying immigration as a national security issue rather than a question of what to do with millions of people in the country illegally, a sign of his evolving stance on a topic that remains one of his liabilities with conservative voters.

"The issue is not the same one we had a few years ago," Rubio told voters recently in New Hampshire. "This issue's different now; we have radical jihadist groups that are using our immigration system against us."

As he seeks to emerge as a top contender in the GOP's crowded presidential field, Rubio still finds himself explaining his past support for an immigration overhaul bill that included a path to citizenship. Texas Sen Ted Cruz, one of his chief rivals, tries to use the bill to brand Rubio as too soft on the issue. And on the campaign trail, Rubio is often asked about immigration, either by skeptical voters or those simply seeking an explanation of where he stands.

"He still hasn't made up with me yet regarding the Gang of Eight," said David Merritt, a Massachusetts voter who came to see Rubio in Atkinson, New Hampshire. Merritt's comments refer to the immigration bill Rubio co-authored. "I'm not 100 percent sure that I trust him," Merritt said. The overhaul bill passed the Senate, with Rubio's help, but he later backed off the proposal as it began to draw fire from the conservative right. Asked to explain, he says he now favors a one-piece-at-a-time approach.

Modernize system

He says the federal government needs to boost border security and modernize the legal immigration system before it deals with the 11 million people here illegally. He says the government must do better at tracking the millions who overstay visas and must make mandatory the e-verify system, an Internet-based program that allows employers to check the eligibility of prospective employees through federal databases.

But in recent weeks, Rubio also has shifted the conversation, starting the immigration segment of his stump speech by painting gaps in the US-Mexico border and the existing legal immigration system as a national security threat. And he's taken to telling voters that the Islamic State group is actively recruiting fighters to send to the United States posing as doctors, students and investors.

"Radical jihadist groups, the same people who carried out the attacks in Paris, who inspired the attacks in California, are trying to use our immigration system against us," Rubio said Thursday to a crowd packed into a Bedford home.

"They've already gotten someone into this country as a fiancée," he said, referring to Tashfeen Malif, the wife accused in the California shootings. A Pakistani citizen, she was allowed into the country in 2014 to marry a US citizen. The FBI said after the shooting that Malif and her husband had been radicalized for some time, but the FBI also said recently there's no evidence of outside actors in coordinating the shooting.

IS concerns

Rubio says if the government doesn't know "100 percent" who someone is or why they are coming into the United States, they won't be allowed in under his administration. "This has become a national security issue, and when an issue changes, so must your policies," he said. But Rubio's stance on immigration was fluid long before the Islamic State was a concern.

As Florida's House speaker in 2008, Rubio came under fire from GOP colleagues for not bringing several bills aimed at discouraging illegal immigration to the House floor for a vote, including bills to increase employer verification requirements and require police to report those suspected of being in the country illegally.

He began to shift rightward when he ran for the Senate in 2010 as a tea party favorite, pledging to oppose any legislation that would grant amnesty to the millions here illegally. Pressed about what to do with millions already here illegally, Rubio said then that they would return to their homelands and re-enter once the federal government enforced a legal immigration system "that works." He also opposed a 2007 comprehensive immigration reform bill authored by Sen John McCain because it included "amnesty" for millions. Yet the bill he helped craft in 2013 included a path to citizenship.

Rubio's shifting stance isn't a problem for some voters. Cindy Coutu of Bedford considers immigration a top concern, and she appreciates his focus on the issue from a national security perspective. "Who's coming in? Who are you? Where are you from? Let's get a better idea, and then start dealing with who is already here," she said. "That makes sense." — AP



MEXICO CITY: A woman reads La Jornada newspaper in Mexico City, on January 10, 2016 which shows a picture of drug lord Joaquin Guzman, aka "El Chapo" (right), shaking hands with US actor Sean Penn. — AFP

MEXICO BEGINS EXTRADITION PROCESS AGAINST 'EL CHAPO'

MOVIE STARS, SEWER ESCAPES AND BLOODY SHOOTOUTS

MEXICO CITY: Mexico began the process of extraditing drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman to the United States, two days after the famed fugitive was recaptured following a dramatic, months-long hunt featuring movie stars, sewer escapes and bloody shootouts. Officials warned that the process could take a long time as Guzman's lawyers file legal appeals and maneuver to keep their client in Mexico, where he has already escaped from maximum security prisons twice.

On Sunday, agents formally notified Guzman that he was wanted in the United States. In a statement, the Attorney General's Office said Mexican agents assigned to the international police agency Interpol served two arrest warrants to the drug lord, who is being held at the Altiplano prison following his capture by Mexican marines on Friday.

Guzman's defense now has three days to present arguments against extradition and 20 days to present supporting evidence, beyond the plethora of other appeals they have already started filing. Guzman's powerful Sinaloa cartel smuggles multi-ton shipments of cocaine and marijuana as well as manufacturing and transporting methamphetamines and heroin, mostly to the US. He is wanted in various US states and his July escape deeply embarrassed the government of President Enrique Pena Nieto and strained ties between the countries.

'National sovereignty'

Guzman's attorney Juan Pablo Badillo has said the defense has already filed six motions to challenge extradition requests. Badillo said that his client shouldn't be extradited to the US because "our country must respect national sovereignty, the sovereignty of its institutions to impart justice." On Saturday, a Mexican federal law enforcement official said the quickest Guzman could be extradited would be six months, but even that is not likely because of the many appeals filed by his lawyers. He said that the appeals are usually turned down, but each one means a judge has to schedule a hearing. "That can take weeks or months, and that delays the extradition," he said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment. "We've had cases that take six years."

Mexico's willingness to extradite Guzman is a sharp turnaround from the last time he was captured in 2014, when then-Attorney General Jesus Murillo Karam said the extradition would happen only after he finished his sentence in Mexico in "300 or 400 years."

Guzman was re-apprehended on Friday after a shootout between gunmen and Mexican marines at the home in Los Mochis, a seaside city in Guzman's home state of Sinaloa. Five suspects were killed and six others arrested. One marine was injured. Mexican authorities say actor Sean Penn's contacts with Guzman helped them track the fugitive down - even if he slipped away from an initial raid on the hideout where the Hollywood actor apparently met him.

Penn's article on Guzman was published late Saturday by Rolling Stone magazine, a day after the drug lord's recapture. In it, Penn wrote of

elaborate security precautions, but also said that as he flew to Mexico on Oct 2 for the meeting, "I see no spying eyes, but I assume they are there." He was apparently right.

A Mexican federal law enforcement official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not permitted to comment on the issue, told the Associated Press the Penn interview led authorities to Guzman in the area of Tamazula, a rural part of Durango state. They raided Guzman's remote hideout a few days after the interview and narrowly missed capturing Guzman following his July escape from Mexico's top security prison though a mile-long tunnel.

'Actors and producers'

Describing the capture, Attorney General Arely Gomez said that investigators had been aided in locating Guzman by documented contacts between his attorneys and "actors and producers" she said were interested in making a film about him, though she did not name them. Three months after that close call, marines finally caught him in a residential neighbor-

hood of Los Mochis, where they'd been monitoring a suspected safe house. Guzman was able to escape via storm drains and exited a manhole in the street. But he was captured in a vehicle on the highway.

In the interview in Rolling Stone, Guzman defends his work at the head of the world's biggest drug trafficking organization, one blamed for thousands of killings. When asked if he is to blame for high addiction rates, he responds: "No, that is false, because the day I don't exist, it's not going to decrease in any way at all. Drug trafficking? That's false."

Penn wrote that Guzman was interested in having a movie filmed on his life and wanted Mexican actress Kate del Castillo, who had portrayed a drug trafficker in a television series, involved in the project. "He was interested in seeing the story of his life told on film, but would entrust its telling only to Kate," wrote Penn, who appears in a photo posted with the interview shaking hands with Guzman. Penn's representatives have not commented on the claims by Mexican officials. — AP



CONCORD: Republican presidential candidate, Sen Marco Rubio, R-Fla reaches out for a handshake during a town hall campaign stop. — AP

PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS TAKE 'PROBLEM SOLVER PROMISE'

CONCORD: Six presidential hopefuls have found some common ground on the nation's future, according to a bipartisan group created to bridge the divide between Republicans. No Labels, formed after the 2010 midterm elections, is asking candidates to embrace four broad goals related to job creation, the federal budget, energy independence and entitlements, promote them in the campaign and promise to work with a bipartisan group in Congress on at least one of them within 30 days of taking office.

To be sure, the goals are general enough so that people of vastly different political opinions - not to mention temperaments - can get behind them. Yesterday, the group's leaders are announcing the six who stepped up: Democrat Martin O'Malley, and Republicans Ben Carson, Chris Christie, John Kasich, Rand Paul and Donald Trump.

"I'm totally blown away that notwithstanding the ugly talk you find during any primary campaign, you have six very diverse candidates - a bipartisan group -

who are interested in a Problem Solvers promise," No Labels co-chairman Jon Huntsman told The Associated Press. "That means they're thinking beyond the primary and thinking about the process that will need to be in place to get some really important things done for the American people." The poll-driven No Labels agenda calls for creating 25 million new jobs over the next decade, securing Social Security and Medicare for the next 75 years, balancing the federal budget by 2030 and making the United States energy secure by 2024.

Dogging candidates

More than 1,000 people came to the group's convention in Manchester in October, when eight candidates showed up. Volunteers have been dogging candidates at town hall forums around New Hampshire. Next week, the group will deploy several trucks adorned with billboards to serve coffee to people and enlist their interest in having more candidates make the promise. — AP

SENATE DEMOCRATS RAMMED THROUGH JUDGES, NOW GOP CALLING THE SHOTS

WASHINGTON: After more than 400 days, Luis Felipe Restrepo is finally getting a confirmation vote in the Senate that would make him the first Hispanic federal judge on the US Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit.

With yesterday's vote on the federal judge from Philadelphia, the Senate will have cleared its to-do list of nominees to the powerful appeals courts. Nine vacancies will remain, but President Barack Obama has yet to nominate people for those posts. Among federal trial judges, 26 of Obama's nominees - out of 59 current vacancies - await votes. The Judiciary Committee has approved 13 of them, all by routine voice votes.

The vacancy rate for the federal judiciary rivals recent lows, and the number of current vacancies is almost exactly the same as it was when Obama took office seven years ago. But don't give credit to Republicans who now control the Senate. Chalk it up to a burst of confirmations in 2014 after majority Democrats rewrote filibuster rules and rammed through 89 judges, almost double the number of the previous year and the most since Bill Clinton's second year in office. When 2015 opened, there were just 40 vacancies out of 852 authorized federal appeals and trial judges.

'It's glacial'

Last year, the GOP-led chamber confirmed just 11 federal judges, the least in recent memory. That has Democrats crying foul, suggesting the pace is dictated by electoral politics. "It's glacial," says New York Sen. Chuck Schumer, one of the Democrats' point men on judges. "It's for the partisan purpose of hoping for a Republican president."

The top Judiciary Committee Democrat,

Patrick Leahy of Vermont, criticized Republicans in a Senate speech last month for having "the dubious distinction of matching the record for confirming the fewest annual number of judicial nominees in more than half a century." Leahy added: "Too many Americans who have sought justice in our federal courts this year have instead found delays and empty courtrooms because of Senate Republicans' obstruction on judicial nominees."

It is true that the number of vacancies has risen, but it is still slightly below the 59 vacancies Obama inherited in 2009 when he succeeded Republican President George W. Bush. Vacancies spiked after that as more judges stepped down and as the Obama White House moved slowly on nominating replacements.

Confirmations to lifetime appointments to the federal courts have long been a flashpoint in an increasingly polarized Washington. The current situation pales in comparison with the 2014 struggle that divided the Senate over new rules to accelerate the process. Almost a decade prior, after a spate of Democratic filibusters of President George W. Bush's judicial nominees, GOP leaders explored the same "nuclear option" to get nominees confirmed, but the fight was diffused by a bipartisan compromise.

When Democrats controlled the Senate, Republicans were less likely to filibuster outright, though they were often stinging in permitting votes. In December 2014, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, now a Republican presidential contender, created an opening that Democrats exploited, allowing 11 new judges to be confirmed in an end-of-session burst just before Republicans retook control of the Senate. — AP