

Meyers, Robert (COE)

INQ 05-157

From: Meyers, Robert (COE)
Sent: Thursday, September 29, 2005 4:52 PM
To: Souto, Javier D. (DIST10)
Cc: Escobar, Bernardo (DIST10)
Subject: Town Hall meetings

Dear Senator Souto,

I spoke to Gerald Sanchez earlier in the week about a question you had concerning the Town Hall meetings you regularly hold and your interest in seeking another term of office on the Board of County Commissioners. Bernardo Escobar requested that I give you a written response. As I understand it, you frequently hold Town Hall meetings and you wish to know whether you can continue to hold these meetings now that you have announced your candidacy for re-election. The Town Hall setting provides a forum to interact with the residents in your district, to hear their concerns and to give you an opportunity to explain your work on the County Commission to better serve them. The fact that you are running for re-election should not discourage you from holding these meetings. As long as you serve as the County Commissioner for that District you have every right to meet with your constituents and address their needs. Provided these Town Hall meetings do not turn into political rallies for your re-election bid, it is perfectly appropriate for you to continue to hold them.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss the above in greater detail, please contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Robert Meyers

Meyers, Robert (COE)

From: Sanchez, Gerald (CAO)
Sent: Tuesday, May 30, 2006 10:50 AM
To: Meyers, Robert (COE)
Subject: FW: Town Hall meetings
Attachments: SOUTO 2.pdf; js read poster.jpg; bus shelter poster_2005.pdf

From: Escobar, Bernardo (DIST10)
Sent: Tuesday, May 30, 2006 10:46 AM
To: Sanchez, Gerald (CAO)
Subject: FW: Town Hall meetings

From: Meyers, Robert (COE)
Sent: Wednesday, October 05, 2005 11:58 AM
To: Escobar, Bernardo (DIST10)
Subject: FW: Town Hall meetings

Bernardo,

Thank you for clarifying this matter for me. Insofar as publicity for the town meetings is concerned, I see no reason for the Commissioner to change his approach to the manner in which he promotes these important events. Apparently for many years the Commissioner has decided that one of the most effective means for him to communicate with his constituents is to hold regular town hall meetings. Because he wishes to maximize attendance, he uses a number of different media outlets and other forms of advertisements to publicize these meetings, such as public service announcements, posters and bus bench advertising. By virtue of the fact that the Commissioner is the incumbent he has the right to meet with the residents in his district and it is perfectly appropriate for any notices regarding these meetings to mention him by name. In his capacity as the County Commissioner for his district, Commissioner Souto is well within his rights to use County funds to advertise the town hall meetings – as the purpose behind the advertising and the content of the meeting is an effort by him to be a responsive and responsible local elected official. Clearly, it would be an improper use of public money if he were to turn these meetings into political rallies to advance his candidacy.

Under the circumstances and assuming he receives a challenger to the seat he currently occupies on the Board of County Commissioners, the ethics rule would not preclude him from continuing to utilize public funds to publicize and hold his town hall meetings. I do not believe it is necessary for him to remove or suspend posters that announce the town hall meetings until the qualifying period has closed. In conclusion, my opinion is based on a number of factors: elected officials have the right as incumbents to spend money to reach their constituents as constituent service is the main purpose for his town hall meetings; Commissioner Souto has a history of holding town hall meetings; and he is not changing the way he publicizes his town hall meetings.

If you have any questions concerning the above, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Robert Meyers

From: Escobar, Bernardo (DIST10)
Sent: Thursday, September 29, 2005 5:46 PM

6/1/2006

To: Meyers, Robert (COE)
Subject: RE: Town Hall meetings

Robert,

My question to Gerald concerned not the holding of town meetings, but rather the advertising of these meetings. The Commissioner has been advertising these meetings in the Herald, Diario and several community periodicals for almost 10 years now. He has also been advertising them on bus benches and shelters in his district for over a year now. My question to Gerald, was whether he would have to bring down the bus shelter and bus bench advertisements, once he officially began campaigning for re-election, which would probably be when he opens a campaign account, which he has not done yet. The question is does he have to bring down his town meeting public service announcements, as well as two other public service announcements (one promoting Reading and the Public Libraries and the other an Anti-Litter Campaign Depicting the Commissioner in Front of one of the almost 400 Litter Receptacles which he purchased with office funds over the past 8 years and placed at every single bus stop in his district – That PSA states: Keep Our County Clean – Toss it in!)? I have attached copies of all three PSA posters above for your review.

I had told the Commissioner that I thought that once he opened up a campaign account and officially launched a re-election bid, he should remove or suspend the posters until the qualifying period for potential opponents closed and nobody filed against him or until the election ended in the case that he has any opposition, because a potential opponent (not that I expect any, since he has been re-elected unopposed for 13 years) could file an ethics complaint stating that he is using County funds to promote his image and name instead of campaign funds. Once again, he has always advertised his meetings in newspapers and newsletters. The bus shelter posters is new, because it occurred to us that CEMUSA is supposed to set aside space for PSA's and few County Departments were taking advantage of this, since they have to pay for the cost of producing the posters. It has been a very effective medium for the town meetings, with attendance increasing significantly for both his Westchester and Kendall Town Meetings. He has been holding these monthly meetings at both these locations for almost 20 years since he was in the State House of Representatives. Gerald did not think there was a problem with this, but offered to discuss it with you to get your opinion.

Thanks,

Bernardo

From: Meyers, Robert (COE)
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To: Souto, Javier D. (DIST10)
Cc: Escobar, Bernardo (DIST10)
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Sincerely,

6/1/2006

Robert Meyers