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When will they ever learn?

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The motive behind former Hialeah Mayor Julio Robaina's lucrative secret loan business — uncovered in 2011 when he ran for Miami-Dade mayor — may have been for one of the oldest, and most predictable, reasons in the books.

Transcripts of closed-door court hearings, released this week after a Miami Herald reporter sought the information in anticipation of Mr. Robaina's federal tax-evasion trial next month, allege he needed cash, interest that the hefty loans generated, to — wait for it — keep a mistress, according to federal prosecutors.

But he showed a pattern of hubris by politicians, local and national, that appears epidemic.

Did Mr. Robaina really think he could run for a higher local public office with under-the-table loans totaling more than \$1 million he allegedly hid from the IRS?

The loans eventually ruined Mr. Robaina's run and landed his Ponzi-schemer friend in a Miami federal prison.

Across town in North Miami, Councilwoman Marie Steril was accused of exploiting her position by demanding that her mother receive upgrades denied to other buyers when she bought a home through a federally funded program run by the city through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

While the home was being built in 2011, "Steril insisted that the counter tops and appliances installed in the kitchen be replaced with higher quality products, worth more than \$7,700," the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics found. In other words, taxpayers footed the bill for her improvements.

Other home buyers who sought similar upgrades for themselves or relatives — and even offered to pay the difference — were told they had to abide by the bid specifications. The rules were different for the councilwoman's mother.

The Ethics Commission found Ms. Steril violated Miami-Dade County's Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Ordinance. Now, she could face fines, investigation costs and a public reprimand.

The Ethics Commission says it investigates about 50 similar complaints a year. Now, a group of local professors is saying: Enough. They've created a special school to teach politicians how to do the right thing. Noble, but sad — and apparently, necessary.

They are identifying future political leaders and training them with a free, six-month intensive fellowship dubbed Candidates Academy. The effort comes after three sitting mayors — from Sweetwater, Miami Lakes and Homestead — were indicted on state and federal corruption schemes.

“We deserve better candidates than we have,” said Mark Richard, president of the United Faculty of Miami Dade College. “And yes, polling shows and anecdotal evidence shows that Americans aren’t quite sure we have the best politicians.”

Candidates Academy begins March 29 at MDC’s Wolfson Campus with a half-day primer on running for political office, fundraising and communicating a campaign message.

Ads for the academy are running on Spanish, English and Creole-language radio stations and are creating a buzz. That’s a good thing.

The academy is not the only initiative aimed at keeping our elected leaders on the right path. Another group, the University of Miami’s Good Government Initiative, founded by former County Commissioner Katy Sorenson, is also working to create the type of squeaky-clean politician that James Stewart played in the movies.

Both efforts are commendable, but it’s a shame that so many politicians need to be taught that lying, cheating and stealing are wrong.

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