

Ethics team backs a bar on lobbying for 4 years

By SCOTT BLAKE

Miami-Dade Commission Vice Chairwoman Lynda Bell barely won approval from her colleagues to keep alive a proposed ordinance to double the time former county officials and employees are banned from lobbying the county, but now another government body is weighing in.

The Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust last week unanimously endorsed Commissioner Bell's proposal.

The proposal would make former elected and appointed officials, employees and aides wait four years after they leave county positions to be able to lobby the county instead of the current two-year wait.

"If you choose to be a public servant, you are beholden to the community," said Ethics Commission Chairman Nelson Bellido. "We have seen on the Ethics Commission that the two-year rule is just not long enough."

County commissioners approved Ms. Bell's proposed ordinance on first reading last month by a narrow 7-5 vote. The next stop is before the commissioners' Public Safety & Animal Services Committee for an Aug. 27 hearing.

Ms. Bell, who is seeking reelection in November, has pointed to former Miami-Dade Deputy Mayor "Chip" Iglesias going to work for Tallahassee-based lobbying firm BallardPartners shortly after resigning from his county post as a prime example of the need to slow down "the revolving door" between county government and lobbying.

About Ms. Bell's proposal, Ethics Commission Executive Director Joseph Centorino said:



Nelson Bellido: The current "two-year rule is just not long enough."

"This would diminish the perception that a former official is trading on any influence he or she may have gained in office."

As another example of the need to regulate lobbyists, the Ethics Commission cited the case of John "Jack" Portman.

Although not involving county government, Mr. Portman, owner of an architectural firm that was interested in the redevelopment of the Miami Beach Convention Center, settled an ethics charge that he illegally lobbied for the work, according to the commission.

The Atlanta businessman claimed he was unaware that, as the owner and principal of Portman Holdings, he had to register as a lobbyist before meeting with several Miami Beach city commissioners from January to July of 2013. When alerted to the law, he registered with the Miami Beach City Clerk.

The Ethics Commission approved an agreement with Mr. Portman, who pled no contest to one count of the complaint with three other counts to be dismissed. Under the settlement, the commission said, Mr. Portman will pay a fine of \$1,000 and investigative costs of \$1,000.