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Campaign Conference Confronts Controversy

Could an election recount similar to the Bush v. Gore 2000 dispute occur again? Some of the key players in that historic legal battle will recount their experiences during one session of a one-of-a-kind Political Campaign Ethics Conference on Friday, May 16, 2014, at St. Thomas University School of Law. The unique daylong event, presented by the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust and the St. Thomas University Center for Ethics, offers a full schedule of panel discussions, lectures and breakout sessions sure to intrigue candidates, campaigners and political junkies of all sorts.

The impact of the controversial “Citizens United” ruling allowing corporations unlimited contributions will be debated by John Bonifaz, the head of an organization committed to overturning the Supreme Court decision, and James Bopp, a legal advisor for Citizens United. Another session featuring former adversaries Xavier Suarez and Kendall Coffey will look back at the 1997 Miami mayoral election that was overturned by an absentee ballot scandal and fast forward to current efforts to stem ballot scams. Party activists Al Cardenas and Dan Gelber will examine the latest efforts to balance concerns of voter fraud with tighter restrictions on voter access. Veteran politicians and legal minds will discuss ethnic and racial innuendo that sometimes sneak into campaigns.

More than 40 speakers, including Justice Gerald Kogan, Mark Caputo, Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Joseph Klock, Jr., George Knox, Ben Kuehne, Theresa Lepore, Patricia Mazzei, Buddy Nevins, J.C. Planas, Irene Secada, Dr. Brenda Snipes and Katy Sorenson will participate. Breakout session topics include campaign consultants, handling media coverage, the election supervisors’ guide for candidates, phantom contributors and ethical campaign practices. Florida State Senator Jeff Clemens will provide an update of ethics and elections legislation from the 2014 legislative session. The luncheon speaker will be Chuck Malkus, author of *The Ultimate Ponzi: The Scott Rothstein Story*.

The conference runs from approximately 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the St. Thomas Law School, 16401 NW 37 Avenue in Miami Gardens. The cost, which includes breakfast, lunch and all materials, is \$90, but early registers (prior to May 1) will be charged only \$75. Current students pay \$50. Attorneys can earn continuing legal education credit.

A complete program and registration information can be found at ethics.miamidade.gov.

The Ethics Commission was created in 1996 as an independent agency with advisory and quasi-judicial powers. It is composed of five members, serving staggered terms of four years each. Through a program of education, outreach and enforcement, the Commission seeks to empower the community and bolster public trust.

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