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### **Local politicians settle election law violations**

The Florida Elections Commission (FEC) has approved settlements of campaign violation complaints against Doral Mayor Luigi Boria, Miami City Commissioner Francis Suarez and Opa-Locka City Commissioner Luis Santiago that were initiated by the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (COE). Consent Orders for the men were approved at the November 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the FEC.

The complaint filed by the COE against Boria stemmed from his campaign for mayor in 2012 in which several state election laws regarding campaign financing and reporting were allegedly violated. Among them, Boria, who self-financed most of his campaign, was forced to loan himself an additional \$1,700 weeks after the election to cover unpaid invoices due to his attorney. Under state law, a candidate cannot accept contributions – even his own -- after the election. That is the violation that Boria, through his attorney, admitted to, and he paid a negotiated fine of \$325 to the FEC.

The COE investigation into Santiago also stemmed from 2012, when he ran for a seat on the Opa-Locka City Commission. Serving as his own campaign treasurer, Santiago failed to pay vendors in a timely manner, wrote multiple checks on an account with insufficient funds, and then, after winning office, asked a printer to falsify invoices so as to avoid reporting campaign finance violations. The printer refused to do so, and Santiago was forced to open a new account – other than his original campaign account – and made an improper payment to the vendor to settle the unresolved campaign debt. The FEC found Probable Cause to several violations of Section 106 of Florida Statutes (election laws). The Consent Order approved last month required Santiago to pay a \$2,000 fine.

In another Final Consent Order approved by the FEC on November 17<sup>th</sup>, a Miami-based Electioneering Communication Organization (ECO), “The Future Is Now,” paid a \$1,000 fine based on a complaint the Ethics Commission filed in November 2014 regarding a flyer attempting to influence the countywide property appraiser’s race. It alleged that the group, chaired at the time by Miami City Commissioner Francis X. Suarez, violated state laws prohibiting ECOs from expressly advocating for a specific candidate. One side of the flyer quoted Suarez, in Spanish and English, advocating for the election of Eddy Gonzalez; the other side attacked Gonzalez’s opponent, the eventual winner, Pedro J Garcia.

“The Ethics Commission has a history of working with other agencies to make candidates and public officials accountable for their actions and abide by local and state laws,” said COE Executive Director Joseph Centorino. “We hope these actions will serve as lessons to other officials and remind them that campaign laws are designed to improve transparency and increase public trust in the political process, and must be followed,” he added.

*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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