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Husband and wife lobbyist and politician settle ethics violations

A South Miami-Dade couple has settled with the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust for failing to report income from business and community groups. A complaint (**C 09-05**) filed by the Independent Advocate against Kentward Forbes alleges that the Board Member of the Naranja Lakes Community Redevelopment Agency failed to disclose payments he received from various sources on financial disclosure forms filed for 2005, 2006 and 2007, as required by law. Forbes told investigators he had no primary source of income, but state records show he is the registered agent for several incorporated entities, including "Citizens Integrated Voices Inspiring Changes (CIVIC)," "Civic Services" and "Naranja Optimist Club, Inc." through which he received several thousand dollars for consulting services and community organizing. He also was paid \$26,000 by the First National Bank of South Florida, \$20,000 from Holland & Knight LLP, more than \$10,000 each from CIVIC and Palm II and \$9,000 from Sandy Rivers Walker during that period. Forbes agreed to pay a fine of \$1,500 and accept a letter of instruction. As part of the settlement, a different complaint (**C 09-27**) against his wife, Patricia Forbes, was dismissed, but she, too, will receive a letter of instruction. The South Bay Community Council (#15) member had failed to list on her financial disclosure forms that she received checks totaling \$4,200 from "CIVIC" during 2006 and \$2,240 from the same organization in 2007.

The Ethics Commission found no probable cause to a complaint (**C 09-39**) that North Miami City Councilman Michael Blynn violated municipal law by using his city-issued credit card to buy airline tickets for his wife to accompany him on government-related trips. Councilman Blynn contends limitations of on-line reservations required the use of only one credit card so he and his wife could travel together and that he immediately repaid the city for his wife's expenses. He has since turned in his city credit card.

A complaint (**C 10-12**) filed against Miami City Commissioner Marc Sarnoff was dismissed as not legally sufficient. A citizen accused Sarnoff of violating state law by meeting with former City Manager Joe Arriola and Jorge Perez, president of the Related Group, between November of 2006 and January of 2007, prior to the commission's January 25th vote on a building project proposed by the Related Group next to Mercy Hospital. The Ethics Commissioners ruled they did not have jurisdiction because the alleged event took place more than three years ago and they have no power to enforce the state rule. Additionally, there is no evidence that the meetings influenced Commissioner Sarnoff since he consistently voted against the proposed project.

Miami Beach City Commissioner Jerry Libbin may serve as President/Executive Director of the Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce, with certain limitations. That's the response to Libbin's Request for Opinion (**RQO 10-08**) before taking over leadership of the non-profit corporation that supports local businesses. The Ethics Commission recommended that Commissioner Libbin avoid voting on matters brought before the City Commission by directors of the Chamber related to Chamber business.

A complaint (**C 10-09**) that alleged a Miami-Dade County Corrections official used his official position to have a subordinate falsify a report was dismissed because it was considered to be a personnel matter outside the jurisdiction of the Ethics Commission. The board also withheld action on a complaint (**C 10-13**) filed against officials of the Miami-Dade Police Department by an officer alleging acts of misconduct, pending resolution of union grievance and a civil lawsuit initiated by the officer.

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 and outreach, the Commission seeks to empower the community and bolster public trust.

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