



For Immediate Release: June 26, 2012
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Settlement reached with South Miami Commissioner

The Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (COE) has reached a settlement after probable cause was found last month that South Miami City Commissioner Robert Welsh violated the County Ethics Code. The complaint (**C 12-25**) alleged that the commissioner, who was elected in February, spoke with two bidders in April about a pending city contract while the proposals were still under consideration, which is prohibited by procurement rules. As part of the settlement agreed to today, Commissioner Welsh will pay \$250 in investigative costs and accept a Letter of Instruction.

The Ethics Commission found No Probable Cause to several complaints (**C 12-10, 12-11, 12-12 & 12-14**) filed against Homestead Mayor Steve Bateman over his use of a video produced by the city for his 2011 re-election campaign. The allegations stem from a contract between the city and a private videographer who shot the 2011 State of the City address for presentation on Homestead's website, and the subsequent use of some of that video for Mayor Bateman's campaign. Based on an Appellate Court ruling in a similar case, the Ethics Commission staff concluded that the State of the City video is a public record and may be used for any lawful purpose, including a political campaign. There were also allegations that some members of the mayor's staff were involved in his campaign on city time. However, the Ethics Commission found no evidence to support that allegation and the complaint was dismissed.

A complaint (**C-12-27**) alleging it is unethical for one person to hold two public positions in different municipalities was found Not Legally Sufficient by the Ethics Commission and dismissed. A private citizen questioned the legality of Michael Pizzi serving as both Miami Lakes Mayor and Medley Town Attorney, especially as it concerned the denial of the complainant's application for a business license. However, there is no prohibition against holding two public positions in different municipalities in the Miami-Dade Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Ordinance, and documentations support the rationale for not approving her application.

In other action today, the Ethics Commission proclaimed Friday, October 12, 2012, as "Ethical Governance Day." The goal of this first annual event is to promote greater appreciation of how responsible citizenship promotes ethical government. While it is hoped that all public and private institutions throughout Miami-Dade County will participate in civic and educational activities on that day, there will be an emphasis on senior high school students – many of whom will vote in their first election the following month. In cooperation with Miami-Dade Public Schools, the Ethics Commission plans to place political, civic and business leaders in every high school government class to discuss the importance of practicing and recognizing honesty, civility, integrity and respect in public service.

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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