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Contact: Joseph Centorino, Executive Director
(305) 350-0613 or centori@miamidade.gov

Hernandez hearing set for April

The Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (COE) today set a public hearing for April 8, 2015, at 1 p.m. on the complaint (**C 14-36**) accusing Hialeah Mayor Carlos Hernandez of lying to the public about income he earned from a private loan. Probable Cause was found last month that Mayor Hernandez violated the Truth in Government portion of the County Charter for his comments to news reporters regarding interest income he earned from business deals with Ponzi schemer Luis Felipe Perez compared to testimony he gave in a federal trial. The hearing date was set following a staff report to the Commission that the mayor has indicated through his attorney that he will not participate in Ethics Commission proceedings.

The Ethics Commission approved a Letter of Instruction for former State Rep. Eddy Gonzalez, who was accused in a complaint (**C 14-38**) of violating the Mandatory Fair Campaign Practices Ordinance when he ran for Property Appraiser last year. The winner of the race, Pedro Garcia, charged the Gonzalez campaign with lying in political ads which stated that, in his first term as Property Appraiser, Garcia paid a \$400,000 salary to a no-show employee, which was proven inaccurate. Although no probable cause was found to the complaint, the COE stated there is no question that the political advertisements “distort the truth” and were “made with knowledge of their falsity.” The Letter urges Gonzalez and all campaigners to consider that “the ethical candidate has no need to resort to misleading and deceptive political advertising.”

A Letter of Instruction was also ratified for Bay Harbor Islands Mayor Robert Yaffe who last month agreed to settle a complaint (**C 14-53**) charging him with earning compensation from a third party seeking a benefit from his city, which is prohibited by the Code of Ethics. It reminds Mayor Yaffe that he “cannot represent a client in a private real estate transaction where the opposing party is the very municipality where he serves as a public official,” even if the transaction was perfunctory. Even though Mayor Yaffe returned the fee he received for representing 9300 Condominium Association in the transfer of property from the town, the Letter states that “it is often the mere appearance of impropriety that shakes the public’s trust in its elected officials.”

In other action today, Executive Director Joseph Centorino announced that more participants, including University of Miami head football coach Al Golden, have been confirmed for the “Ethics in Education” conference scheduled for May 1 and 2, 2015, held in conjunction with the University of Miami and Miami-Dade Public Schools. The Miami-Dade School Board is expected to endorse the event at its meeting today.

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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