

Hialeah mayor pays \$4,000 ethics fine — in pennies and nickels

HIGHLIGHTS

Mayor Carlos Hernandez was fined for lying about receiving interest for loans he made

He tried to pay with buckets of coins last year, but it was rejected

Ethics commission says mayor was forced to count his own pennies





Handing over 145 boxes full of pennies and nickels, Hialeah Mayor Carlos Hernandez has paid a \$4,000 fine by the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust for publicly lying about his businesses dealings with a convicted jeweler.

Hernandez paid the fine in coins Wednesday at a bank in downtown Miami where the county has an account. The money was to be transferred to the ethics commission to fulfill an agreement negotiated in early April.

“We met our promise to pay, just like we tried to do from the beginning,” Hernandez told el Nuevo Herald. “I hope this puts an end to this political circus that they started.”

Ethic Commission Director Joseph Centorino rejected Hernandez’s first attempt to pay with the coins in November. For Centorino, it was an insult that in the end embarrassed Hialeah residents.

On Thursday, Centorino issued a statement saying that although the commission had originally refused to accept buckets of coins from Hernandez in payment, the mayor was ultimately forced to do the counting and boxing of the coins himself.

The 140 boxes of pennies, totaling \$3,500, and five boxes of nickels totaling \$500, were deposited at the City National Bank on Flagler Street.

“In the end, the Mayor acknowledged that he was liable for the fines imposed on him for his untruthful behavior and he paid them in full,” Centorino’s statement said. “The Ethics Commission refused to accept his bucket of coins, and, in the end Mr. Hernandez was forced to count his own pennies. The case is closed. The Ethics Commission did its job.”

The ethics commission found Hernandez guilty last summer of lying to the public, both in Spanish and English, about the high interest rates he was paid on a \$180,000 loan to jeweler Luis Felipe Pérez, convicted in a Ponzi scheme that defrauded \$40 million from scores of people, including Hernandez.

During his electoral campaign for mayor, Hernandez claimed that Pérez had made only principal payments on the loan. But when Hernandez testified as a prosecution witness in the trial of former Hialeah Mayor Julio Robaina, he acknowledged receiving more than \$100,000 in interest payments from Pérez.



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