

Ethics panel sends Homestead case to Florida Elections Commission

HIGHLIGHTS

An ethics investigation in Homestead referred to the state's election commission

Investigators believe there was wrongdoing in a campaign to extend former Homestead City Council member's term limits

Mark Goodrich, a campaign consultant who ran a political committee in support of Judy Waldman, is accused of falsifying petitions





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An ethics investigation found evidence of possible wrongdoing in a campaign to allow a former Homestead City Council member to seek re-election beyond her term limit, and the results have been turned over to the state elections commission for further action.

The close-out report by the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust quoted witnesses who said Mark Goodrich, a campaign consultant who ran a political committee in support of Judy Waldman, asked several people to falsely witness hundreds of petitions signed by local voters. In addition, the report said, the campaign failed to report it paid workers \$2 or \$4 for every signature collected, possibly violating state law.

Ultimately, the petition was pulled by Goodrich after scrutiny from the council and Waldman left office after the November elections. She told the Miami Herald she did not initiate circulation of the petitions and did not even know about them until “long after.” The ethics commission, whose investigation lasted almost a year, said it couldn’t prove that Waldman was directly involved, and the report doesn’t recommend any action against her.

But Goodrich could be fined thousands of dollars if the Florida Elections Commission determines — as the ethics commission recommends — that he violated Florida Statute 104.011. The law states that “a person who willfully swears or affirms falsely to any oath or affirmation, or willfully procures another person to swear or affirm falsely to an oath or affirmation, in connection with or arising out of voting or elections commits a felony of the third degree.”

The state attorney’s office declined to pursue a criminal case after it learned that petitions for Homestead charter amendments did not need to be witnessed to be valid. To Goodrich — who has run campaigns for candidates for the U.S. Congress, Cutler Bay, Miami Gardens, Fort Lauderdale and New York City — “that’s what’s important.”

“All the signatures were valid, collected legally, and verified by the county. I did not ask people to commit a crime, or even commit an election violation for that matter; if not, the state would have decided to take action,” Goodrich said.

He said the investigation was “totally politically motivated.”

“Everyone perceived that [Mayor] Jeff Porter and Judy Waldman have been friends for years. People who do not like the mayor did not want to see Waldman get elected,” Goodrich said. “All they did was waste thousands of dollars of taxpayer money on an 11-month investigation. They

did not need an 11-month investigation to tell what the obvious was; I did nothing wrong, the state sees that. Now they'll send it to the Elections Commission because they don't want to come back and say nothing.”

The investigation was triggered by allegations made by former Homestead councilman Steve Losner and former Miami-Dade County Commissioner Lynda Bell.

Although some voters said they believed Waldman was involved with the petition drive, investigators “did not find witnesses implicating [Waldman] with respect to the possible false swearing on the petitions themselves,” said Karl Ross, an ethics commission investigator. As a result, Waldman was not even interviewed.

The Homestead charter prohibits council members from serving more than 12 consecutive years in office. At the time of the November election, Waldman had been on the council 10 years; being reelected to a four-year term would have exceeded the limit.

In order to challenge that and remain in office for another term, Waldman needed 2,343 valid signatures on the petition. Ethics investigators say about 1,000 of the approximately 3,000 signatures collected were falsely sworn. That finding became moot when the campaign learned that Homestead doesn't require them to be witnessed anyway. Goodrich withdrew the petitions.

In the report, five witnesses were cited as saying Waldman and her husband, Merv — who ran for Waldman's seat in November and lost — did ask them to circulate petitions, but not sign them.

Waldman told the Miami Herald she was “absolutely never involved.”

“I don't know most of these people so how would they know me? I don't have a clue who they are,” Waldman said. “It saddens me because I had nothing to do with this petition.”

Ross told the Miami Herald in an email that “the witnesses stated that while they believed Waldman was involved with the petition drive, they were taking their direction from Goodrich, who was the primary paid political consultant and who managed the petition drive from start to finish. The employees who signed the blank petitions all said they did so at Goodrich's instruction.”

Ross said in the report: “It is abundantly clear from text messages [Goodrich] exchanged with campaign workers that the councilwoman was the driving force behind the campaign and that he provided funding and other support necessary for its survival.”

Records show that the political committee run by Goodrich, Moving Forward PC, collected about \$43,000 and was mainly funded by Homestead developer Wayne Rosen and Homestead contractor Charles “Pinky” Munz. Records obtained by the ethics commission show the

committee paid Goodrich about \$40,000 to run the petition drive.

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