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November 21, 2019

FPPC fines former Contra Costa County Official $150,000 for misuse of campaign funds

The Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC), California’s governmental ethics and campaign disclosure agency, today approved one of its largest penalties of the year against a former public official who used campaign funds for himself. The $150,000 penalty was levied against former Contra Costa County Clerk/Recorder Joe Canciamilla for personal use of campaign funds, one of the most serious violations of the Political Reform Act. Among other things, Canciamilla was found to have used the funds to remodel a vacation home in Hawaii and for a vacation to Asia. Canciamilla fully reimbursed the committee for the $130,529 improperly used and the approved settlement required Canciamilla to pay half the penalty with his own personal funds.

“One of the basic trusts people place in the system is when you give money to a candidate, it’s used as intended, which is a campaign, not to line their pockets or take vacations,” said FPPC Chair Richard C. Miadich. “Not only is this egregious in and of itself, but even more troubling is the damage to the public trust. That’s why this required a strong penalty, and the public deserves strong actions to restore and maintain integrity in the system.”

Canciamilla is a former State Assemblymember as well as a former candidate for Contra Costa Superior Court Judge. The matter arose from an audit performed by the Franchise Tax Board’s Political Reform Audit Program. The audit uncovered numerous issues, including personal use and reporting errors. The FPPC Enforcement Division then conducted an exhaustive investigation which determined Canciamilla misled the FTB for the purpose of concealing other violations, including additional personal use of campaign funds, false reporting, and commingling of campaign funds with personal funds. Besides the home remodel and Asian vacation, Canciamilla admitted nearly all of this activity was concealed on his campaign filings through a mixture of non-reporting, over-statement of available cash on hand, and other reporting violations.

The full exhibit of facts can be found here:

“I’m proud of our Enforcement unit for helping uncover this scheme,” said FPPC Chief of Enforcement Galena West. “The work of our investigative unit took the FTB’s findings and uncovered even more instances and details. I thank the Commission for approving this substantial penalty to show how serious we are about making sure public officials serve the public, and not themselves.”

FPPC Commissioners voted unanimously at the November 21st meeting to approve the settlement. The penalty has been paid, and all penalties go to the State’s General Fund.

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