



TEC: Lucio, Oliveira must answer complaint by end of month

California watchdawg chronicles alleged campaign fund missteps

BY EMMA PEREZ-TREVIÑO/The Brownsville Herald

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The Texas Ethics Commission has set an end-of-the-month deadline for state Sen. Eddie Lucio and state Rep. Rene Oliveira to respond to complaints that they improperly used campaign funds and failed to fully report the source of contributions.

They have until the end of the month to answer to the state agency that responds to ethics questions, concerns and violations regarding state officials' reporting of campaign contributions and the use of the funds.

In letters to Lucio and Oliveira dated March 4, TEC Assistant General Counsel Ian M. Steusloff requested their response within 25 days of receipt.

Dave Palmer, a political writer who describes himself as a "watchdawg" from Folsom, Calif., filed the complaints Feb. 25 against the two Brownsville Democrats and six state judges, an appellate judge, two justices of the Supreme Court, 10 other representatives and four other senators.

"I'm on a crusade," Palmer said in a telephone interview from California.

He explained that after an accident involving a family member and encounter with the court system and a judge about 15 years ago in Ohio he thought, "What the hell is going on with these judges?"

Palmer, 63, began investigating them and that expanded to politicians and a search of political databases throughout the country, leading him to other states, including Texas and filings with TEC.

"I just decided to go after politicians and I would do what I could do and expose them for what the hell they are. I don't care where they are, who they are or how powerful they think they are. I'm not impressed," he said.

"I'm a one-man army and do what I can."

The complaints against Lucio and Oliveira allege that they converted political contributions to their personal use and failed to properly disclose the principal occupation or job title and employer of contributors.

Lucio did not respond to a request for comment.

Oliveira on Friday said he is taking the complaint seriously.

"We are looking at the allegations. Many of them are frivolous and some may require us to clarify or amend reports, but we certainly had no intent to withhold or fail to provide detailed information," Oliveira said.

"If we made a mistake, we certainly will own up to it."

Oliveira also questions the complainant's motive, indicating that Palmer is writing a book and scours the campaign statements in several states for material.

He also noted that if one looks at the hundreds of statements on file with TEC, these will contain "technical mistakes" and failure to report the occupation of contributors.

Palmer reported on his Web site, noethics.net, that Lucio "takes the cake so to speak for serial violations of the Texas Ethics Laws that prohibit the use of campaign funds for personal use. On forty-three (43) occasions he violates the law by failing to provide any detail (explanation) other than 'Supplies for Austin Campaign Residence.' "

"His repeated purchases of cleaning supplies (17 occasions) clearly violates Texas law as does his purchase of (a) rat poison, rat traps and bug spray, unless it was intended for two-legged varmints rather than four-legged ones. From 2001 to 2007 Eddie spent \$11,501.99 on furniture and a TV. In addition, he spent at least \$1,526.98 on bedding and as much as \$2,000.00 from April 2001 to Jan 2007. How much bedding and sheets can one guy use?" Palmer writes in his complaint.

He noted that Oliveira utilized campaign funds to pay for dry cleaning, groceries, food, laundry, and beverages for his Austin apartment.

TEC Ethics Advisory Opinion No. 104 states that, "Legislators may not use political contributions to pay laundry and dry cleaning expenses incurred in Austin."

Oliveira said that, "I am confident that we can explain all this in further detail to The Texas Ethics Commission and certainly we will." Palmer also forwarded his complaints to the Travis County District Attorney's Office.

Palmer made the news in Texas a few days ago when, as reported by The Associated Press, Todd Gallaher, a veteran legislative aide to State Sen. Bob Deuell resigned after allegedly calling Palmer and identifying himself as a reporter with the *Dallas Morning News*, asking about the ethics complaint that Palmer had filed against Deuell.

"Sen. Deuell apologized to me profusely," Palmer said of the incident.

Palmer has contacted Lucio's and Oliveira's staff personally, telling them they should admit to the improprieties he alleges.
