



## **Campaign law violations cost Oliveira \$3,000**

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By Emma Perez-Trevino, The Brownsville Herald

The Texas Ethics Commission fined state Rep. Rene Oliveira \$3,000 for campaign law violations, but found insufficient evidence that he used campaign funds for personal use.

TEC found that Oliveira, D-Brownsville, failed to include in campaign reports the occupations and employers of several contributors who gave him \$500 or more in the summer of 2006 and for the 2008 Democratic Party Primary.

The campaign reports are filed with TEC, which responds to ethics questions, concerns and violations regarding state officials' reporting of campaign contributions and the use of the funds. TEC issued its findings Dec. 4.

"It was a series of record keeping errors that were made unintentionally and in haste. The reports were corrected within 14 days of this being brought to my attention, and I can assure you that my future reports will meet all requirements," Oliveira said in a press release disclosing the findings that he issued Sunday.

Dave Palmer, a writer who describes himself as a "watchdog" from Folsom, Calif., filed complaints with TEC Feb. 25 against Oliveira, state Sen. Eddie Lucio, D-Brownsville, six state judges, an appellate judge, two justices of the Supreme Court, 10 other representatives and four other senators. The findings in those cases could not be determined Sunday.

Oliveira said he was glad that the reporting lapse and mistakes were brought to his attention.

"I wonder if Rene can get insurance for all the mistakes he made," Palmer quipped Sunday in a telephone interview while on the road in Ohio.

"I'm now working on an ethical stimulus package," said Palmer, who continues his one-man campaign throughout the country to impact campaign laws. Palmer started the campaign after a troublesome encounter with judges, and he started investigating them and other political officials.

Palmer said that it is nice to know that TEC responded to his complaints, but would hope that the agency takes it job more seriously and tightens abuses.

Palmer also had complained that Oliveira used campaign funds to pay for dry cleaning, groceries, food, laundry, and beverages for his Austin apartment, contrary to a TEC ethics opinion that legislators may not use political contributions to pay laundry and dry cleaning expenses incurred in Austin.

Oliveira said Sunday that he had deposited \$18,000 of personal money into his campaign accounts during the period in question, perhaps lending to the impression that he may have used campaign funds for personal expenditures.

"I regret that a perception was created that something may have been improper. As the commission found, I used my own money that had been deposited into the campaign account," the state representative said.

Oliveira said that he also modified accounting practices for his campaign account, following the advice of commission counsel to create new accounts for legislative per diem and state travel expenses.

"The commission has made its decision regarding the reporting errors, and I take full responsibility," Oliveira said.

Oliveira said he will pay the fine from personal funds, instead of campaign funds unlike other officials although TEC allows such fines to be paid with campaign contributions.

"I am using my own money to pay this fine because I do not want my contributors paying for my mistake," Oliveira said.

Palmer became known in political circles in Texas when he filed the complaints this year and when, as reported by The Associated Press in March, 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.

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