

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION DISMISSES FOUR MOST SERIOUS ALLEGATIONS AGAINST MONROE COUNTY MAYOR PRO TEM NEUGENT

KEY WEST – At today’s meeting of The State Commission on Ethics in Tallahassee, the commission dismissed the four most serious charges against Monroe County Mayor Pro Tem George Neugent, finding no probable cause that he misused his public position or accepted improper gifts or compensation to influence his vote.

Key West resident Richard Boettger accused Neugent of misusing his public position by allegedly steering the County’s animal control services contract for the Middle Keys away from Stand Up for Animals (SUFA) to a new organization allegedly founded by a friend of Neugent. Boettger also accused Neugent of improperly voting to award the contract to his friend’s animal control organization. The Ethics Commission found no evidence to support either charge.

Boettger also lodged three allegations accusing Neugent of improper conduct in connection with an honorary membership at Sombrero County Club in Marathon. The Ethics Commission found no evidence that Neugent had solicited or accepted the membership in exchange for influencing his vote on the County Commission. The Ethics Commission also found that the membership was not a type of improper compensation given to him to influence his vote.

The Ethics Commission did find that Neugent should have disclosed the honorary membership on his financial disclosure form as a gift because it was worth more than \$100. Had Neugent reported this honorary membership as a gift, there would have been no ethics violation. The honorary membership has a value of \$500 per month.

The Ethics Commission did find probable cause on two other lesser charges dealing with sloppy or incomplete answers on his financial disclosure forms that are required for elected officials.

- He listed “Simington” as the address for the Monroe County administration building instead of the correct spelling and complete address: “1100 Simonton Street, Key West, Florida.”
- He listed a creditor as “medical” without any other identifying information. He should have listed the name and business address of the creditor.
- He listed “savings” as an asset instead of listing it as an annuity with the RiverSource Life Insurance Company.

“I am responsible for some sloppy paperwork and I apologize for any problems it has caused,” Neugent said. “In the future, I will be extra careful to properly fill out my financial disclosure forms.”

Neugent’s attorney Mark Herron, with Tallahassee-based law firm Messer Capareello, said that under the Commission’s rules and procedures, Mr. Neugent can challenge the allegations at an administrative hearing or elect to engage in settlement discussions with the Commission’s staff. That decision has not been made.

With these types of remaining allegations, the Ethics Commission usually recommends civil penalties that include fines.