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**NEWS RELEASE**  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
AUGUST 16, 2019

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**CRIMINAL GRAND JURY INDICTS THREE MEN, INCLUDING FORMER MAYOR,  
IN PALM SPRINGS PUBLIC CORRUPTION CASE**

**RIVERSIDE** – Today, August 16, 2019, District Attorney Mike Hestrin announced that a criminal grand jury has returned an indictment against the former mayor of Palm Springs and two local developers in connection with a public corruption case involving about \$375,000 in bribes paid to the former mayor of Palm Springs.

After a series of delays in trying to conduct a preliminary hearing, the District Attorney's Office determined that an indictment would be the best method to move the case forward toward seeking justice for the community of Palm Springs. Consequently, the District Attorney's Office opted to proceed by grand jury indictment rather than conduct a preliminary hearing.

Stephen Philip Pougnet, DOB: 4-27-63; Richard Hugh Meaney, DOB: 1-7-66; and John Elroy Wessman, DOB: 10-22-38, are charged in the indictment. Pougnet is the former mayor of Palm Springs and Meaney and Wessman were two local developers in the city.

The defendants will be ordered to appear for arraignment in Riverside County Superior Court on Sept. 12, 2019.

Real estate developers Meaney and Wessman secretly funneled money to former mayor Pougnet between 2012 and 2014 in order to buy his influence. At that time, both developers had a number of significant, lucrative development projects before the City Council of Palm Springs. Pougnet, who was the mayor at the time, voted on a number of projects in which he had a financial interest over the same timeframe. Pougnet failed to disclose those financial interests on his Statements of Economic Interest [Form 700], which were signed under penalty of perjury.

The 30-count indictment, which was returned on Aug. 15, 2019, includes nine counts Penal Code Section 68 (accepting a bribe by an executive officer), nine counts of Penal Code Section 69 (bribing an executive officer), eight counts of Government Code Section 1090 (conflict of interest), three counts of Penal Code Section 118 (perjury), and one count of Penal Code Section 182 (conspiracy to commit bribery).

Pougnet was indicted on 21 counts and Meaney and Wessman were each indicted on 10 counts.

If convicted as currently charged, Pougnet would be barred for life from ever holding public office and faces a potential maximum sentence of more than 19 years in state prison. If convicted as currently charged, Wessman and Meaney each face a potential maximum sentence of 12 years in state prison.

The case, INF1901460, is being prosecuted by Emily Hanks, David Allen, and Amy Barajas of the DA's Public Integrity Team.

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