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NEWS RELEASE
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DA HESTRIN ANNOUNCES CHARGES IN PALM SPRINGS PUBLIC CORRUPTION CASE

RIVERSIDE – Today, Feb. 16, 2017, Riverside County District Attorney Mike Hestrin announced the filing of charges against three men in a public corruption case involving an estimated \$375,000 in bribes paid to the former mayor of the City of Palm Springs.

Charged in this case are former Palm Springs mayor Stephen Philip Pougnet, DOB: 4-27-63; Richard Hugh Meaney, DOB: 1-7-66; and John Elroy Wessman, DOB: 10-22-38. Meaney and Wessman are developers in the area.

“We simply cannot tolerate corruption in government at any level,” DA Mike Hestrin said. “The people of Palm Springs are entitled to and should expect fair, open, and honest government in their city.

“I want to commend the members of the Public Integrity Team here at the DA’s Office, as well as the Inland Regional Corruption Task Force for all their tremendous dedication and exemplary work in this case,” Hestrin added.

The criminal complaint, filed today, Feb. 16, 2017, charges 30 total counts covering all three defendants. The complaint charges nine counts of accepting a bribe by an executive officer (Penal Code section 68), nine counts of bribing an executive officer (PC section 69), eight counts of conflict of interest (Government Code section 1090), three counts of perjury (PC section 118), and one count of conspiracy to commit bribery (PC section 182).

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

All three defendants are expected to surrender themselves to the court in the next few days. Dates for the arraignments of each defendant will be provided when made available by the court.

Based on the evidence obtained during the investigation by District Attorney’s investigators assigned to the District Attorney’s Public Integrity Team, this is a synopsis of the case: Developers Meaney and Wessman secretly funneled money to Pougnet when he was the mayor of Palm Springs over the years 2012 through 2014 in order to buy his influence. At the time, both developers had a number of significant and lucrative development projects that were before the Palm Springs City Council. Pougnet, while serving the city as its mayor, voted on a number of projects in which he had a financial interest over that same timeframe. During that time, Pougnet never disclosed those financial interests on any of his Statement of Economic Interest (Form 700) documents, which he signed under penalty of perjury.

The case is being prosecuted by Deputy DAs Amy Barajas and Emily Hanks of the DA’s Public Integrity Team.

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