

FOUL! – Valley Medical again using public funds to campaign

Senator Pam Roach (R-31st) and Representative Christopher Hurst (D-31st) cried foul about a mass mailing paid for by Public Hospital District #1 (Valley Medical Center) that looks to be yet another blatant violation of State laws that bar public agencies from campaigning.

The public hospital is already appearing before the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) on October 25th to receive penalties for its previous election law violations during 2005 and 2006 “emergency” stealth Spring elections that were called by Valley’s board of commissioners and featured no voters’ pamphlets. A PDC staff investigation of Valley Medical’s practices in those elections found the “biggest misuse of public funds for campaign purposes in State

history.”

“Here they go again,” said Senator Roach, “I’m diagnosing Valley Medical with a consistent case of campaign finance violations. What they want to do is break the law, win the elections and worry about the consequences afterwards. They know that all the PDC is likely to do is to fine the Hospital a few thousand dollars. They probably reason that isn’t a bad trade-off – they cheat, they win. The leadership there needs to be changed and they need real reform”

Representative Christopher Hurst added, “I’m deeply troubled that Valley Medical’s Board does not seem to learn from the past or be willing to obey the law. This Board of Commissioners is simply ignoring very clear laws on not using taxpayer funds to campaign. This is probably the most blatant violation I

have ever seen.”

“I hope the citizens respond the same way they did to these folk’s last ill-advised and unlawful use of public funds against the public’s interest,” Hurst said, referring to the record breaking loss in 2006 when Valley Medical got less than 6% of the vote despite illegally using taxpayer money to campaign.

There are two long-term incumbents on the Valley Medical Board of Directors currently running for re-election. The 24 page full-color glossy mailing that went out to people throughout the over 400,000 person district contained no less than six color pictures of one of the incumbents and five color pictures of the other. Most were in the types of poses that would be typical of a campaign mailing.

The “special edition” mailing coming out in the days before absentee ballots are mailed makes the taxpayer-

funded mailing especially shocking. The Board of Commissioners hasn’t learned the very basic lessons of what public entities can and cannot do in using public funds.

Anthony Hemstad and Sue Bowman are running as reform candidates against entrenched incumbents to stop the abuse of public funds at Valley Medical. Hemstad said, “Public hospital funds should be spent on more ER not needless PR. Burning public health care funds on vanity advertising designed to help the incumbents keep their jobs is a complete miscarriage of what a public hospital should be all about.”

Another PDC complaint against Valley’s Board of Commissioners is currently being drafted for this new disregard for campaign laws.

The full cost of producing and mailing such a large publication would normally be at minimum \$200,000. This compares to a

record setting \$60,000 that has been raised to officially be spent in what is already the most expensive hospital commission race in state history between Anthony Hemstad (Maple Valley’s City Manager) and incumbent Commission President Carol Anderson. Anderson has only 13 donors, all with direct ties to the hospital and keeping the status quo. Hemstad, on the other hand, has more than 8 times the number of donors (110). Both have raised about \$30,000.

Public Hospital District #1 includes all of Kent, Renton and Covington and parts of Bellevue, Newcastle, Tukwila, Auburn, Maple Valley and Black Diamond along with large areas of unincorporated King County. It levies a tax on all private property of 59 cents per \$1,000 valuation (note, for comparison’s sake the City of Maple Valley’s 2008 property tax levy is \$1.21 for all services).