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# Embattled city ethics executive director resigns

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By Ben Gutierrez, Reporter / Weather Anchor  CONNECT

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - The embattled executive director of the Honolulu Ethics Commission, Chuck Totto, has resigned, effective immediately.

Totto had led the commission since April 2000.

"It's just not worth it for me, frankly, emotionally and physically, to keep banging my head against the wall," Totto told Hawaii News Now.

Totto said one reason for his resignation is the adversarial relationship with the administration of Mayor Kirk Caldwell.

"We've had a three-year battle, three and-a-half year battle now, with the administration over budget issues and independence and that type of thing," he said.

Totto also created a stir when he told reporters that if city council members failed to disclose meals and golf from rail lobbyists, then those rail votes were null and void.

"All we were doing was telling people this is what the Hawaii Supreme Court and the Hawaii Intermediate Court have said: If you have a conflict of interest, your vote's nullified," he said.

That led the commission to approve a strict media policy that said Totto couldn't comment on commission decisions to reporters.

"Some members of the commission don't trust me to run the office, to make important decisions," said Totto. "I've had my responsibilities clipped back and back and back."

The commission also dropped a complaint against current council members Ann Kobayashi and Ikaika Anderson, and former council member Donovan Dela Cruz, for accepting free meals from lobbyists supporting the rail project. Their attorney was former congresswoman and current Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation board chair Colleen Hanabusa. She contended that Totto was wrong in counting up the meal costs for each council member.

Honolulu Police Chief Louis Kealoha also filed suit against the commission in an effort to stop an ethics probe against him and his wife.

"As a friend, my opinion was that this was undeservedly shoddy treatment," said former Honolulu mayor Peter Carlisle, who is Totto's attorney. Carlisle is also challenging Caldwell in this year's mayoral race.

Through a spokesman, Caldwell thanked Totto for his service to the city. Ethics Commission chair Victoria Marks also thanked Totto, saying in a statement, "He brought a passion and an unwavering dedication to the ethics commission. His contributions will reverberate for years to come."

Totto said he is weighing all his options, but said that filling the vacant position of State Ethics Commission chief is not one of them.

He also said he's leaving with his "head held high."

"I wish the commission all the luck in the world," he said. "They're gonna need it."

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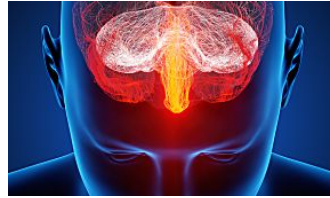


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