

The Maui News

Panel deadlocks over mayor's use of campaign war chest

Sponsorship of softball not valid advertising expense, some say



Arakawa

Maui County Mayor Alan Arakawa, who has been playing softball since the 4th-grade, recently came under fire from the state Campaign Spending Commission for using campaign funds to support senior softball teams he played on, managed and sponsored.

A complaint filed last year claimed that the mayor personally benefited from his campaign spending on the senior and “*makule*” league softball teams. On July 12, the commission deadlocked 2-2, with one member recusing himself on the issue, of whether there was probable cause that the candidate committee, Friends of Alan Arakawa, violated campaign finance laws, commission staff said Tuesday.

The deadlock means that the proceeding ends.

Arakawa called the complaint, which took around nine months and personal attorneys to resolve, “*much to do about nothing.*”

“*We have been reporting this and reporting all the expenses for years,*” Arakawa said Tuesday of his campaign organization sponsoring teams. No one brought up the matter until last year.

The complaint, filed on Nov. 10, said Arakawa used \$3,389.24 from the Friends of Alan Arakawa accounts to pay for various softball items, including bats, caps, balls, uniforms, socks, shirts, softballs and tournament entry fees. The expenditures were noted as advertising expenses on campaign spending reports, because the uniforms have “*Friends of Alan Arakawa*” printed on them, the mayor said.

Similar to businesses trying to get their name out, Friends of Alan Arakawa sponsors the teams to get name recognition, Arakawa said.

Campaign Spending Commission General Counsel Gary Kam said Tuesday that Arakawa is incorrect in his comparison of private companies sponsoring a team for an advertisement and the mayor's use of campaign funds. Private companies are not covered by campaign spending laws.

According to the definition of advertising for campaign spending purposes, Kam said there has to be a message to support the election of a candidate. While Arakawa's name might have been on jerseys, there was no tie to an election and, “*there was no messages on the bats, balls, caps and socks,*” Kam said. The mayor also used campaign funds to pay for tournament entry fees, which offer no election message.

Arakawa talks about playing softball since the 4th-grade in a YouTube video, but the mayor never ties softball to his political career, Kam said. The mayor could have paid for the softball fees and items personally, but he used his campaign war chest instead, Kam indicated.

Arakawa said he uses campaign funds for sponsorships of the annual Makawao Rodeo Parade and other parades and for events in which he is a participant.

“This is what we normally do to get our name out,” he said, adding that these other campaign fund uses were not included in the complaint.

Arakawa, whose run as mayor ends next year due to term limits, has said he intends to seek the lieutenant governor’s seat next year and confirmed Tuesday that that still is his goal. The complaint has been delaying his attempt to put together a campaign team and to get things running, he added.

During the timespan of the complaint from late 2014 into mid 2015, Arakawa said he coached or managed teams and did not play much because he couldn’t make it to practices. He felt it wasn’t fair to play if he didn’t practice, though he would take the field if the team didn’t have enough players.

When he did take the field, Arakawa said he would play second base or catcher.

* Melissa Tanji can be reached at mtanji@mauinews.com.

COMMENTS

0 Comments

Sort by



Add a comment...

Facebook Comments Plugin

The Maui News



NEWS

Local News
Obituaries
Community
News
Business

SPORTS

Local Sports
Sports
Spotlight
Hawaii Sports
National
Sports

OPINION

Editorial
Letters to the
Editor
Columns

CONTACT

Subscribe
Submit News
Advertise
Contact Us

Weddings
Backstage
Dining Out
Island Events

Copyright © Maui News | <http://www.mauinews.com> | 100 Mahalani Street, Wailuku, HI 96793 | 808-242-6363 | Ogden Newspapers | The Nutting Company