



**BEFORE THE STATE COMMISSION
ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT**

CJC Nos. 16-0513-MU & 16-0540-MU

PUBLIC REPRIMAND

**HONORABLE LEONEL LOPEZ
RIO GRANDE CITY MUNICIPAL COURT
RIO GRANDE CITY, STARR COUNTY, TEXAS**

During its regularly scheduled meeting on February 7-8, 2018, the State Commission on Judicial Conduct concluded a review of the allegations against the Honorable Leonel Lopez, Judge of the Municipal Court in Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas. Judge Lopez was advised by letter of the Commission's concerns and provided written responses. After considering the evidence before it, the Commission entered the following Findings and Conclusion:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. At all times relevant hereto, the Honorable Leonel Lopez was Judge of the Municipal Court in Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas.
2. On or about January 21, 2016, Judge Lopez shared the following campaign advertisement of Jesus Maria "Chuy" Alvarez, a candidate for District Attorney of the 229th Judicial District, on his Facebook page:



3. During the 2016 election for Rio Grande City Council, Judge Lopez was observed sitting under the campaign tent of Joel Villarreal, a candidate for Rio Grande City Mayor, Rey Ramirez, a candidate for City Commissioner Precinct 2, and Chachi Dave Jones, a candidate for City Commissioner Precinct 4.
4. On or about March 13, 2016, Judge Lopez shared the following campaign advertisement of Joel Villarreal, Rey Ramirez, and Chachi Dave Jones, on his Facebook page:



5. In his response, the judge stated that he had “no involvement” and “did not authorize” the posting of Alvarez’s campaign advertisement on his Facebook page. He further stated that he did not learn of the posting until he received the letter of inquiry from the Commission.
6. Judge Lopez stated that he had “no involvement” and “did not authorize” the posting of Joel Villarreal, Rey Ramirez, and Chachi Dave Jones’ campaign advertisement on his Facebook page. He further stated that he did not learn of the posting until he received the letter of inquiry from the Commission.
7. The judge concluded that he believes his conduct is in compliance with Canon 5(2) because he has “not endorsed nor authorized the use of [his] name to endorse any candidate.”

RELEVANT STANDARDS

1. Canon 2B of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct, states, in pertinent part: “A judge shall not lend the prestige of judicial office to advance the private interests of the judge or others...”
2. Canon 5(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct states, in pertinent part: “A judge or judicial candidate shall not authorize the public use of his or her name endorsing another candidate for public office, except that either may indicate support for a political party.”

CONCLUSION

The Commission concludes based on the facts and evidence before it that Judge Lopez lent the prestige of his judicial office to advance the private interests of Jesus Maria “Chuy” Alvarez, a candidate for District Attorney of the 229th Judicial District, Joel Villarreal, a candidate for Rio Grande City Mayor, Rey Ramirez, a candidate for City Commissioner Precinct 2, and Chachi Dave Jones, a candidate for City Commissioner Precinct 4 in their respective elections by publicly sharing their campaign advertisements on his Facebook page. The Commission further concludes that Judge Lopez’s actions constituted an improper public endorsement of the aforementioned

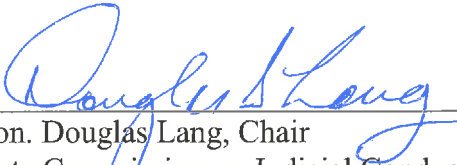
candidates for public office. The Commission concludes that Judge Lopez's conduct, described above, constitutes a willful violation of Canons 2B and 5(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.

In condemnation of the conduct described above that violated Canons 2B and 5(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct, it is the Commission's decision to issue a **PUBLIC REPRIMAND** to the Honorable Leonel Lopez, Judge of the Municipal Court in Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas.

Pursuant to the authority contained in Article V, §1-a(8) of the Texas Constitution, it is ordered that the actions described above be made the subject of a **PUBLIC REPRIMAND** by the Commission.

The Commission has taken this action in a continuing effort to protect the public confidence in the judicial system and to assist the state's judiciary in its efforts to embody the principles and values set forth in the Texas Constitution and the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.

Issued this the 6th day of June, 2018.



Hon. Douglas Lang, Chair
State Commission on Judicial Conduct