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Keely Butler, second grade, Poinciana Elementary School

State ethics commission dismisses multiple complaints

BY TIMOTHY O'HARA

Citizen Staff

The Florida Commission on Ethics has tossed out a complaint Geiger Key resident Paul Caruso filed against Monroe County Commissioner Dixie Spehar, citing it lacked legal sufficiency.

Spehar said she felt vindicated by the commission's decision, issued Wednesday in a press release.

"I am not crooked," Spehar said. "Once you get in office, people think you are. ... He (Caruso) has the right to search, and he has the right to search. You walk in with your integrity, and it is all you leave with."

Caruso accused Spehar of voting in favor of county comprehensive-plan changes that dealt with maintaining working waterfronts and commercial marinas. Caruso claimed the owner of the marina where she lives could benefit from the changes. Caruso said Spehar should have abstained from voting on the changes, which passed 3-2 but later were rejected by the state Department of Community Affairs.

The Florida Commission on Ethics press release said it also had dismissed ethics complaints filed by sheriff's candidate Sandra Downs against Monroe County Sheriff Rick Roth, sheriff's administrator Mike Rice and prominent Monroe County Republican Carey Goodman. In reporting those dismissals in Thursday's edition, The Citizen incorrectly reported that Spehar was among the subjects of Downs' complaints.

Caruso still has two other complaints pending against Spehar. He has filed another Ethics Commission complaint and a complaint with the state Elections Commission about Spehar using her office and her assistant for her re-election campaign.

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