



**State of Washington
PUBLIC DISCLOSURE COMMISSION**

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January 29, 2026

Delivered electronically to pops1947.jh@gmail.com.

Subject: PDC Case 179477 regarding John Higgins

John Higgins:

The Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) completed its review of the complaints filed by Terri Cooper and Erin Bishop on September 30, and October 20, 2025. The complaints alleged violations of 42.17A.320 and .335 for failure to provide sponsor identification on campaign signs, the improper use of “re-elect” on yard signs and for using a city logo in political advertising.

Applicable Laws and Rules

[RCW 42.17A.320\(3\)](#) sets forth the size and placement requirements for identifying the sponsor of political advertising. Subsection (a) states that the font size used in the sponsor identification statement for a written advertisement or communication directed at more than one voter must be at least the larger of the following: 1) ten-point type; or 2) ten percent of the largest type used in the advertisement.

[RCW 42.17A.335](#) states: (1) It is a violation of this chapter for a person to sponsor with actual malice a statement constituting libel or defamation per se under the following circumstances:

- (a) Political advertising or an electioneering communication that contains a false statement of material fact about a candidate for public office;
- (b) Political advertising or an electioneering communication that falsely represents that a candidate is the incumbent for the office sought when in fact the candidate is not the incumbent;
- (c) Political advertising or an electioneering communication that makes either directly or indirectly, a false claim stating or implying the support or endorsement of any person or organization when in fact the candidate does not have such support or endorsement.

(2) For the purposes of this section, "libel or defamation per se" means statements that tend (a) to expose a living person to hatred, contempt, ridicule, or obloquy, or to deprive him or her of the benefit of public confidence or social intercourse, or to injure him or her in his or her business or occupation, or (b) to injure any person, corporation, or association in his, her, or its business or occupation.

(3) It is not a violation of this section for a candidate or his or her agent to make statements described in subsection (1)(a) or (b) of this section about the candidate himself or herself because a person cannot defame himself or herself. It is not a violation of this section for a person or organization referenced in subsection (1)(c) of this section to make a statement about that person or organization because such persons and organizations cannot defame themselves.

(4) Any violation of this section shall be proven by clear and convincing evidence. If a violation is proven, damages are presumed and do not need to be proven.

[RCW 42.17A.005\(1\)](#) establishes that "Actual malice" means to act with knowledge of falsity or with reckless disregard as to truth or falsity.

Background and Findings

- Respondent is a candidate for City Council Member of the City of Medical Lake in the 2025 election year.
- The complaint alleged that the Respondent failed to include required sponsor identification on political advertising, improperly used the term "re-elect" on campaign yard signs, and used the City of Medical Lake's official logo on a political mailer.
- John Higgins previously served as mayor of Medical Lake, most recently elected in the 2013 general election, but did not so serve at the time of the election at issue.
- PDC staff sent a copy of the initial complaint to the Respondent on October 1, 2025. Higgins stated that he was unaware of the new requirement for sponsor identification on campaign signs. Following notification from PDC staff, the Respondent updated the signs to include the required sponsor identification and removed the prefix "re-" from "re-elect."
- Higgins included the City of Medical Lake logo on a campaign mailer but did not include a statement claiming endorsement by the city.
- The logo appears on the City website and can be copied by any member of the public without restriction.

- It is PDC's staff's determination that the use of an official city logo that is publicly available does not constitute a false endorsement and therefore does not violate RCW 42.17A.335.
- The Respondent does not have previous warnings or violations of similar PDC requirements.

Summary and Resolution

Based on our findings, staff has determined that, in this instance, any violation that may have occurred was minor and has been cured. After consideration of the circumstances, further proceedings would not serve the purpose of this chapter. Under WAC 390-37-060, the executive director, at any time prior to consideration by the commission, may dismiss a complaint which on its face, or as shown by investigation, provides reason to believe that a violation has occurred, but does not amount to a violation that warrants further investigation.

Pursuant to WAC 390-37-060(1)(d), however, you are receiving a formal written warning concerning failure to provide sponsor identification on political advertising. Staff expects that you provide complete sponsor identification on all future political advertisements. The Commission will consider this formal written warning in deciding on further Commission action if there are future violations of PDC laws or rules.

Based on this information, the PDC has dismissed this matter in accordance with RCW 42.17A.755(1).

If you have questions, contact Colin Peeples at 1-877-601-2828 or by e-mail at pdc@pdc.wa.gov.

Sincerely,

Electronically signed by Colin Peeples

Colin Peeples
Compliance Officer

Endorsed by,

Electronically signed by Peter Frey Lavallee

Peter Frey Lavallee
Executive Director

cc: Terri Cooper; Erin Bishop