

Zeldin facing accusations

Campaign funds allegedly misused

BY TOM BRUNE
tom.brune@newsday.com

A Suffolk County Democrat has filed a complaint with the Federal Election Commission against Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-Shirley) alleging he illegally used funds from his State Senate campaign to aid his successful 2014 U.S. House campaign.

According to the complaint, Zeldin violated federal election law by using his state campaign to pay for ads before the primary and general election in his House race, and by using a network of state and local political party committees to transfer his State Senate campaign funds to his federal campaign.

Zeldin denied the allegations through Jennifer DiSiena, his campaign spokeswoman. She called the complaint "frivolous" and said the FEC hasn't contacted Zeldin about it.

Robin Long of Hampton Bays confirmed that last Thursday she filed the complaint, which Newsday obtained. Long resigned as Suffolk County ethics board chairwoman in June to manage the campaign of Southampton Town Board member Bridget Fleming (D-Noyac) for Suffolk County Legislature.

"There was a concern among local Democrats regarding the financing [of Zeldin's campaign]. I took a look at it. Somebody had to take the lead on it, and I felt I would," Long said in a telephone interview.

Long said she has "no ax to grind" but felt it was important for the FEC to review the questions about the Republican's



Rep. Lee Zeldin was accused of illegally using money for his successful 2014 run.

campaign financing.

DiSiena, however, said, "This partisan hit piece is desperate, reckless and irresponsible, trying to connect dots off of dozens and dozens of false assumptions."

Federal election law prohibits transfer of a candidate's state campaign funds to his federal campaign committee.

Under the laws of New York and other states, corporations and labor unions can contribute to candidates for state office but federal law bars contributions to congressional or presidential candidates from federal contractors, corporations and unions.

The complaint said state campaign-finance records show that as Zeldin was running for Congress in 2014, his State Senate committee paid \$3,765 for ads in publications of local groups such as Temple Beth-El of Patchogue, the Suffolk County Court

Officers Association and the Bayport-Blue Point Little League.

Those payments came within 90 days of the New York primary and the general election, qualifying them as a barred in-kind contribution to his federal campaign fund and making them appear to be the result of prohibited coordination between his state and federal campaigns.

The complaint also said state campaign-finance records show that Zeldin's State Senate campaign contributed \$58,000 to state and local Republican and Conservative party committees, which in turn donated \$16,000 to Zeldin's federal-campaign committee. Those contributions represent illegal "reciprocal transfers" from his State Senate committee to his House campaign committee.

The complaint faces hurdles, one expert said.

"The FEC will initiate the en-

forcement process on the basis of this complaint, but, without more evidence, the FEC will most likely eventually dismiss the complaint as speculative," said election law attorney Brett Kappel of the Washington law firm Akerman.

He said the complaint fails to include copies of the ads, crucial to determining if a violation occurred, or any evidence of collusion among Zeldin and state and local party committees to "launder" his State Senate funds through them and then back to the federal fund.

According to the complaint, however, in 2002 the FEC entered a settlement agreement on a complaint against Rep. Phil Gingery (R-Ga.) for a series of reciprocal contributions between his State Senate campaign fund and his U.S. House campaign fund, based on the pattern of dates and amounts of the fund transfers.

Biddle replaces Sroka as Tilles Center chief

BY STEVE PARKS
steve.parks@newsday.com

Tilles Center for the Performing Arts has a new executive director. William R. Biddle, founding director of the Ferguson Center for the Arts at Christopher Newport University in Hampton Roads, Virginia, was selected after a national search following the retirement in July of Elliott Sroka, who served as Tilles Center's director for 29 years.

"Bill Biddle's success in build-

ing a vibrant performing arts venue from the ground up is a testament to his vision, managerial acumen and passion for the arts," Peter J. Klein, chairman of the Tilles Center Board of Overseers, said as he announced the appointment on Monday. "His record of attracting world-renowned performers makes him an ideal leader to continue our 35-year tradition of bringing the world's greatest performers to Long Island."

"I am honored by the opportunity to lead LIU's prestigious

Tilles Center," Biddle said after his appointment. "The energy on campus, the commitment to creativity and the clear institutional vision for excellence are incredibly contagious and motivating."

He makes the move to the LIU Post campus in Brookville after 12 years at the Ferguson Center. Since it opened under Biddle's direction in 2004, Ferguson has drawn more than 2 million visitors and hosted an array of internationally renowned performers, including the Jazz at

Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Andrea Bocelli and Arturo Sandoval, among many others.

"We're pleased to welcome Bill Biddle to the LIU community," LIU president Kimberly R. Cline said. "I'm certain that under Bill's stewardship, Tilles Center will continue to produce programs that challenge the limits of higher education and expand access to the arts throughout the region."

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Long Island Office
235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, NY
11747-4250

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THIS DATE IN HISTORY

1865 Mark Twain's first literary success, the original version of his short story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," was first published in the New York Saturday Press under the title "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog."

1928 Walt Disney's first sound-synchronized animated cartoon, "Steamboat Willie" starring Mickey Mouse, premiered in New York.

1959 "Ben-Hur," the Biblical-era spectacle starring Charlton Heston, world premiered in New York.

1978 Rep. Leo J. Ryan (D-Calif.) and four others were killed in Jonestown, Guyana, by members of the Peoples Temple; the killings were followed by a night of mass murder and suicide by more than 900 cult members.

2005 Eight months after Robert Blake was acquitted at a criminal trial of murdering his wife, a civil jury decided the actor was behind the slaying and ordered him to pay Bonny Lee Bakley's children \$30 million.