

# Rio Hondo trustee will face \$18,500 fine for campaign finance violations

## SAN GABRIEL VALLEY TRIBUNE

By [Hayley Munguia](#), Posted: 02/09/17

Rio Hondo College trustee Gary Mendez, who represents south Whittier and Santa Fe Springs, will likely be hit with an \$18,500 fine from California's Fair Political Practices Commission next week.

Mendez's proposed penalty, which is for failing to timely file three semiannual campaign statements and failing to pay required annual fees to the Secretary of State's Office, is one among 28 fines against elected officials statewide that the commission will consider at its Feb. 16 meeting. The fine is significantly larger than most others on the agenda. Twenty-one of the 28 proposed penalties are below \$1,000.

"It's much higher than other penalties because it's a default decision," said Phillip Ung, a spokesman for the commission. He said other officials are facing a lower fine because they responded to warnings from the commission and reached settlement agreements.

Mendez was first elected to the Rio Hondo board in 1999. The statements in question were for December 2014, July to December 2015, and January to June 2016. Mendez was reelected in 2015.

"We filed charges, and we gave him notice," Ung said. "And Mr. Mendez never communicated with us to negotiate a settlement. When they don't communicate, which many other plaintiffs have in this case, he gets a default fine."

The specific charges of failing to file campaign statements are serious, Ung said, because that's the main documentation the commission and the public can use to keep track of elected officials' financial dealings. "They're incredibly important in regards to public information," he said. "The law entitles voters to know how money is being spent and how much is being raised ... those statements are how we determine whether a committee is operating above board or not. Not only is the public deprived, but we're not able to enforce the lawful requirements."

Ung added the annual fee is used to help the Secretary of State keep track of which committees are active. These fees also go into a specific fund that helps modernize the Secretary of State's online campaign finance disclosure system.

While the fine is only a proposed penalty, Ung said the commission will almost certainly approve it. "It is really rare that somebody challenges a proposed penalty," he said. "Especially on default cases where they haven't communicated with us at all."

Mendez and Rio Hondo officials did not respond to requests for comment.



Leo Jarzomb — Staff Photographer Rio Hondo College Area 4 Trustee candidate Gary Mendez pictured at a candidate forum sponsored by the Whittier League of Women Voters at the Whittier City Council Chambers Oct. 26, 2011.