

Candidates begin seeking distance from veterans PAC

BY SARAH KLEINER
CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

WASHINGTON – Five congressional candidates – including incumbent Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., and four U.S. House challengers – say they will either return or donate to charity the contributions they received from a veterans-focused political action committee whose sister nonprofit is under investigation in New York and Virginia.

Reached by the Center for Public Integrity, the politicians said they plan to give away the \$1,000 they each received from Put Vets First! Political Action Committee.

Other House and Senate candidates were noncommittal about the funds or did not return requests for comment.

Put Vets First! PAC is affiliated with the Center for American Homeless Veterans, which has been the subject of an ongoing Center for Public Integrity investigation.

New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman last week joined Virginia's attorney general in probing the charitable solicitations of the Center for American Homeless Veterans – a nonprofit based out of the same Falls Church, Va., office as the Put Vets First! PAC and the nonprofit Circle of Friends for American Veterans.

The \$1,000 Heller's campaign received from Put Vets First! PAC – a political committee led by retired Army Maj. Brian Arthur Hampton – will be given to an unspecified Nevada veterans' charity, Heller's campaign spokesman Keith Schipper said.

Lindsey Davis Stover, one of several Democrats vying for her party's nomination in Virginia's 10th Congressional District race against incumbent Republican Rep. Barbara Comstock, has given the

\$1,000 her campaign received from the Put Vets First! PAC to Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors Inc., an Arlington, Va., -based nonprofit that helps those who have lost a loved one in the military.

Michael Milisits, who is running for the Democratic nomination in Ohio's 10th District race against Republican incumbent Rep. Michael Turner, said he gave the money he received from the Put Vets First! PAC to the Wounded Warrior Project – which has faced its own scrutiny – as soon as he read the Center for Public Integrity's stories about the PAC's background.

Vito Sagliano, a Navy veteran and Republican candidate running in an August primary against several others for Tennessee's open 2nd Congressional District seat, said he doesn't plan to return the money to the Put Vets First! PAC because he says he's already spent it.

Instead, Sagliano says he plans to give any money left over in his campaign committee coffers to a local veterans charity.

Ernie Martin, a Democrat

who is running for Hawaii's open 1st Congressional District seat, said he is returning the money he received from the Put Vets First! PAC with a request that it be spent directly on veterans.

A spokesperson for Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Tamika Lyles in Florida said her office would wait until the attorneys general investigations into the PAC's sister charity are resolved before deciding what to do with the money she received.

The campaign of Rep. Steve Knight, R-Calif., who also received \$1,000 from the Put Vets First! PAC, did not directly address what, if anything, Knight planned to do with the money.

Neither Republican U.S. Senate candidates Eric Brakey in Maine and Dominic Rapini in Connecticut, nor Democratic congressional candidate DuWayne Gregory in New York, responded to requests for comment.

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