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DISTRICT ATTORNEY
ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA
TODD SPITZER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

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**Rancho Santa Margarita Mayor and Longtime City Councilmember
Carol Gamble**
Pleads Guilty to Falsifying Nomination Paperwork to Run for Re-election
*Gamble is not eligible to take office if re-elected in
November 5, 2024 Rancho Santa Margarita City Council election.*

SANTA ANA, Calif. – Rancho Santa Margarita mayor and longtime city councilmember Carol Gamble pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor today for falsifying nomination paperwork stating she personally collected the signatures necessary to qualify her for the November 5, 2024, Rancho Santa Margarita City Council election for District 3. As a result of the falsified nomination paperwork, Gamble will not be eligible to serve on the Rancho Santa Margarita City Council should she be re-elected to the seat.

Ballots have already been printed with Gamble's name as a candidate for Rancho Santa Margarita City Council. Due to her ineligibility to serve on the City Council, if Gamble is elected, the city of Rancho Santa Margarita could be forced to hold a special election to elect a candidate eligible to be seated.

As part of a negotiated plea with the government, Gamble, who has served on the Rancho Santa Margarita City Council for 16 of the last 20 years and served four terms as the City's mayor, pleaded guilty to one misdemeanor count of 18660(a) of the California Elections Code, making a false affidavit concerning signatures appended to an initiative, namely her nomination papers. In exchange for her admission of guilt, she will not be charged with felony perjury.

The terms of the negotiated plea include 160 hours of community service, submission of her DNA, and restitution of which the amount has yet to be determined based on the outcome of the election.

City Council candidates are required to collect the signatures of 20 registered voters to qualify as a candidate for a particular elected office. The paperwork includes an attestation that must be signed under penalty of perjury by the person who physically collects the signatures.

On August 7, 2024, Gamble signed candidate nomination paperwork under penalty of perjury that she was the circulator of the candidate paperwork and collected the 30 nomination signatures on the nomination paperwork. Anyone over the age of 18 can circulate the nomination paperwork, but the person signing the paperwork must be the same person who witnessed the signatures in person. Gamble attested under penalty of perjury that she personally witnessed the signatures, but numerous voters who signed Gamble's nomination paperwork told district attorney investigators that

Gamble was not the circulator of the paperwork, and she did not witness them signing the nomination papers, rendering the signatures invalid.

“American democracy relies on the absolute integrity of the electoral process,” said Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer. “Voters must have total confidence that every election is being carried out in a fair and unbiased manner. Interference in the electoral process in any manner and at any stage jeopardizes the will of the people being carried out while eroding the trust of voters that their vote counts. As the elected District Attorney of Orange County, I refuse to allow our electoral process to be subverted and exploited by anyone. The decision to file criminal charges against the candidate prior to an election is not a decision I made lightly but given the risk to the electoral process as well as the potential of the City of Rancho Santa Margarita having to pay for a special election should Gamble be re-elected, there was no choice but to file criminal charges prior to the election and alert voters of her ineligibility to run for City Council. The Orange County District Attorney’s Office remains fiercely committed to investigating and prosecuting election fraud to ensure the voice of every Orange County resident is heard when they cast their ballot.”

Deputy District Attorney Heather Heslep-Morrissey of the Special Prosecutions Unit prosecuted this case.

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