

# FLAP OVER, BUT END UNSETTLING

Donors and students at Florida Atlantic University better hope "case closed" in the red Corvette scandal doesn't mean a green light for business as usual.

After all, the punishment meted out doesn't send a really sharp message to those who might use FAU's charitable organizations to camouflage their personal dealings. The key player in the drama, former FAU star fund-raiser Carla Coleman, pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor Monday. She gets one year of probation and 20 hours of community service.

That's it, since prosecutors say they will not bring charges against anyone else. The flap is over, but its end remains unsettling.

Let's recap: Officials at the FAU Foundation, a non-profit group that raises money for university programs, used the charitable organization to funnel \$42,000 to FAU's former president, Anthony Catanese. Catanese, who now runs a private univer-

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sity, purchased a sports car with the money. Giving a departing university president a \$42,000 gift is at best a dubious decision. But the way this gift was presented skirted laws, too. Coleman hid the present by funneling the cash through a series of transactions with a decorating firm that did business with Catanese's wife, Sara.

FAU ultimately fired Coleman from her \$185,000-a-year job, and she later faced a felony charge that was eventually reduced to a misdemeanor. After sentencing, Coleman said she did not profit from her actions. Her attorney said Catanese threw Coleman "under a bus at the first opportunity."

The Cataneses have steadfastly said they did not think there was anything wrong with the way the money was handled.

It's hard to believe there are any innocents in this costly and disgraceful episode. Frankly, South Florida has seen money-laundering cases that weren't as sophisticated as this one. Everyone involved in this caper knew it was shady. Why else did they go through so many hoops to disguise it?

What's more, a coterie of FAU officials raised more red flags than Bolsheviks on parade when Coleman was moving dollars around. The skeptics included the finance chiefs at both the university and the foundation.

It's troubling no one seemed willing or able to stop this ill-advised giveaway. And prosecutors haven't sought much in the way of retribution.

FAU's new management team promises much better controls and uses for its dollars. They need to live up to that promise, because there's not a lot of deterrence here to keep the FAU community from being taken for another ride.