

Melissa Fox's statement on the guilty plea of Melahat Rafiei and Rafiei's admission of attempting to bribe officials in Irvine.

I first met Melahat Rafiei in 2009 when she was executive director of the Orange County Democratic Party. I first had any relationship with her in 2010 when she was Beth Krom's campaign manager for Krom's run for Congress and I was simultaneously running for state assembly, and then again when she was Shiva Farivar's campaign manager when Farivar ran for City Council in 2016. In 2018, Rafiei was employed by Patrick Strader and the developer FivePoint as a political consultant for the purpose of gaining Democratic approval for the strawberry fields option for an Irvine veterans cemetery, which I supported as a member of the Irvine City Council.

While Rafiei and I have been superficially friendly over these years, I believed that she was often working surreptitiously against my political goals and beliefs, especially following her involvement in the political career of Farrah Khan. At no time during my political career have I or any of my campaigns employed Rafiei or used any of her various businesses, nor has Rafiei employed me for my legal services.

In May 2018, when I was on the Irvine City Council, Melahat Rafiei asked me to meet with her and a client of hers who had a cannabis business headquarters in Irvine. While on City Council, I often met with Irvine businessowners and this meeting had no specific agenda and did not stand out as different from any other meeting of that type.

Several weeks before and Independent of the meeting, Rafiei had asked me to provide legal work for her consulting firm. I informed her that under a city ordinance I was not legally permitted to represent any client before a governmental body anywhere in Orange County. Rafiei agreed that I would do no work impacting Irvine and I quoted her my regular hourly fee and my regular retainer, and thereafter sent her a proposed retainer agreement. I never heard back from Rafiei regarding this proposed retainer agreement (which I kept in my files and later provided to the FBI).

Subsequently, I learned from the FBI that Rafiei showed this agreement to her client as indicia of an intended bribe to get me to introduce a cannabis ordinance in Irvine. I also learned from the FBI that Rafiei had told other clients that she needed money to bribe officials and then simply pocketed the money herself. Of course, I was shocked and very angry that Rafiei would tell her clients

that she would use this proposed agreement for my legal services to involve me in any corrupt or illegal activity. From that point on, I have been working with the FBI in this matter.

On Thursday, January 19, 2023, I was happy to read that the FBI's announcement that Rafiei had agreed to plead guilty to a felony charge for attempting to defraud one of her political consultancy firm's clients and admitted in court documents that she tried to bribe two members of the Irvine City Council on cannabis-related matters. Later that evening, I received a telephone call from the lead FBI agent on the case, thanking me for my help in bringing Rafiei to justice.

I supported Irvine City Councilmember Kathleen Treseder's call last night for a full and complete investigation into Malahat Rafiei's activities and influence in Irvine. I would still be happy to help any such investigation in any way I can, just as I did with the FBI.

Melissa Fox

January 23, 2023