

Council bans Stuart Robert over late payment for sports venue



Gold Coast federal MP Stuart Robert. Picture: David Clark

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Turnbull government MP Stuart Robert, whose Fadden Forum fundraising arm is the subject of a Queensland Crime and Corruption Commission probe, was banned from using Gold Coast City Council venues after being accused of failing to pay for the hire of a sports complex.

The Australian can reveal the dumped minister was forced to pay almost \$13,000 to the Gold Coast council after hiring the Runaway Bay Indoor Stadium to host three “Stuart Robert MP’s Seniors Expos”.

Mr Robert, whose fundraising entity is understood to be the richest in the Liberal National Party, was sent an “outstanding payments” letter by council chief executive Dale Dickson last Tuesday.

Mr Dickson gave Mr Robert a discount of almost \$4000 on the amount owed, but expressed disappointment the Gold Coast MP had failed to pay hire fees for expos between 2014 and this year. “It is quite clear that event hire and services have never been offered on a free-of-charge basis, as evidenced by the fact payment of \$1000 was made in 2013 and invoices were issued in 2014, 2015 and 2016,” Mr Dickson said.

“To my knowledge, there has been no valid reason provided as to why payment has not been made. It is disappointing and difficult to understand why this account hasn’t been settled.

“I can identify no public interest reason as to why the city should forgo the amount it is validly owed, and which now stands at \$12,834 (after the discount).

“Regrettably, until such time as this is settled, no further bookings for the hire of City of Gold Coast venues can be accepted.”

Mr Robert confirmed last night that the bill had been outstanding until this week.

The 45-year-old MP said he hadn’t paid the bill because council had not sent him invoices for the sports hall hires.

“They did not provide the invoice. I said to them: ‘Where’s the invoice?’ That’s the problem. They hadn’t given me an invoice for three years,” Mr Robert said. “They gave me the invoice and I paid it.”

Asked about whether he was surprised the letter had been leaked, Mr Robert said: “There’s a lot of love in the air at the moment.”

The seniors’ expo is attended annually by thousands of his constituents and has been held since at least 2010.

Mr Robert was dumped from the ministry last year over his associations with donors.

Queensland’s anti-corruption watchdog launched an investigation this year after *The Australian* revealed Mr Robert’s fundraising arm had bankrolled the campaigns of staffers Kristyn Boulton and Felicity Stevenson, who ran as independents at this year’s Gold Coast council election.

Mr Robert gave \$30,000 each to Ms Boulton, who was elected, and Ms Stevenson, who later returned to his office.

He provided a further \$10,000 to former Scenic Rim mayor John Brent.

All three ran at this year’s council elections as “independent” candidates.

The donations came months after Mr Robert was dumped as a minister by Malcolm Turnbull, amid controversy over links to businessman and LNP donor Paul Marks.

LNP sources have told *The Australian* that Gold Coast councillors and mayor Tom Tate, who is an LNP member, had distanced themselves from Mr Robert following the CCC investigation.