

Tax, debt disputes inspired candidacy

takenly registered as a Democrat for four years. "I thought I'd never run for Congress, ever," he said.

Lynch lives near West Palm Beach and is an entrepreneur who has formed companies under variations of the name DeLeon, which he likes because: "I'm a Leo and it's Spanish for 'of the lion.'" There was DeLeon Industries, of New Jersey, a communications tower company. The now-dormant DeLeon Industries, of Florida, a building company. And DeLeon Capital, of Florida, a loan modification firm.

In 2006, the IRS hit Lynch with tax liens of \$212,999 and \$1.15 million for unpaid income tax dating to 1999. The IRS won't talk about it, citing privacy laws. Lynch says the government erred by taxing him for a corporate credit card used by his employees and by overvaluing profits from the sale of DeLeon in New Jersey. He said his attorneys have "resolved all the issues" and are awaiting the lifting of the liens.

During part of that time, DeLeon Industries in Florida had federal contracts worth \$3.5 million to put new windows in the Veterans Affairs hospital in Miami and to renovate two wings.

Lynch got the jobs, in part, because his company was classified as a firm owned by a veteran disabled in the service. Lynch is neither a veteran nor disabled. He said a former business partner of his was, but declined to

name the man. "These were not jobs that were handed to me," he said. "These were jobs I bid. I was the low bidder."

While working at the hospital between 2005 and 2007, Lynch said he noticed mold behind wallpaper, pigeon droppings in rooms and veterans lying in hallways moaning. He said he complained about the conditions to VA administrators, Wexler and others. But his pleas went unheeded. In retaliation, he said, the VA stopped paying him. The VA would not comment.

Without that income, Lynch said he was unable to pay many of his subcontractors. He filed a case against the VA with the Civilian Board of Contract Appeals, which is ongoing. And his subcontractors sued him, winning nearly \$144,000 in judgments.

One of them, Pam Hamblen, owner of Atlanta Flooring in Tequesta, said DeLeon Industries subcontracted her company in 2007 to place vinyl floors in a plastic surgeon's Boca Raton office. When Lynch didn't pay her \$11,000, Hamblen said, she had to pay \$4,000 to a collection agency to pursue him in court.

"I've already been let down by the man," Hamblen said. "Why would I want him in public office?"

The disputes have taken a toll on Lynch and his bank account, though election records show he was flush enough to loan his campaign \$14,000 in December. "I wouldn't say I'm broke," he said. "But I'd say I'm not financially secure."

Staff Researcher Barbara Hljek contributed to this story.

Megan O'Matz can be reached at momatz@Sun9actinet.com or 954-356-4518.

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