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Member of police oversight board resigns after criticism

Following criticism of his remarks about Miami's police chief, Peter Roulhac steps down from the city's police oversight board.

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A day after several anti-globalization activists called for his resignation, a member of Miami's Civilian Investigative Panel agreed to step down, saying he wanted to "restore credibility" to the board.

Peter Roulhac said Friday afternoon that he did not want to taint the CIP's investigative process by remaining on the board after people have called his credibility into question.

"I thought long and hard about this. Last night was a very tough night for me," Roulhac said, referring to a public hearing held Thursday. "But as long as I am the issue, and not the policies, procedures and actions of the police department being fairly investigated, I should remove myself as the issue."

Roulhac, chairman of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, resigned a month after coming under fire for praising Miami Police Chief John Timoney at a chamber luncheon.

As a CIP member, Roulhac would have been party to an investigation against the Miami Police Department for its handling of the protests at November's Free Trade Area of the Americas summit. His decision satisfied anti-FTAA activists who argued that Roulhac's membership discredited the CIP because he had compromised his integrity by praising Timoney.

"We're encouraged that Roulhac decided to restore credibility to an organization that has a very tough and important task ahead of them," said Naomi Archer, spokeswoman for the Save Our Civil Liberties Campaign, a coalition of civil rights groups formed after FTAA.

But CIP members expressed disappointment, both that the issue had gone so far and that they were losing such an upstanding and well-respected person on the board.

"I think to lose someone with the stature, integrity and background that Roulhac has is sad," said CIP chairman Larry Handfield. "It will be difficult to replace him."

Handfield said while he probably agrees, in hindsight, that Roulhac should not have made those comments about Timoney, he believes Roulhac would have proved his objectivity and fairness if he remained on the board.

The board will now advertise the opening and interview candidates. The City Commission must confirm the appointment. Don Bierman, a CIP board member, said it was an unfortunate turn of events. "I'm sorry for the circumstances that forced him to leave," Bierman said. "He was in a position where he wore two hats. And those two hats just didn't both fit."