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### **Councilman emotional as he testifies during perjury trial**

Chula Vista City Councilman Steve Castaneda, who is on trial for perjury, choked up on the witness stand yesterday as he answered questions about his political career.



Chula Vista City Councilman Steve Castaneda took the stand in his own defense yesterday. Castaneda was charged with 13 counts of felony perjury, but the judge dismissed three of those charges Tuesday.

Castaneda, who is seeking re-election, said he ran for office to make a difference in Chula Vista.

"It was where my family was, it was where I wanted to invest my time and do my community a good job," he said, his voice breaking. Prosecutor Patrick O'Toole charged Castaneda last year with 13 counts of felony perjury. O'Toole said Castaneda "lied about the facts" to obstruct an investigation into corruption allegations involving Castaneda and real estate developer Ashok Israni.

Judge Michael Wellington on Tuesday dismissed three of the perjury charges for lack of evidence.

Yesterday in downtown San Diego Superior Court, Castaneda testified that it wouldn't have occurred to him to lie.

"I knew I didn't do anything wrong," he said.

During three hours of testimony that at times strained Wellington's patience, Castaneda answered questions about his family, his volunteer work on city planning commissions, his career, his election campaigns and his duties as a councilman.

Several times, Wellington asked O'Toole to condense his questioning, saying, "I think the jury has heard this."

About a dozen family members and supporters were in the courtroom, with some wearing "Steve Castaneda for Mayor" buttons from his unsuccessful campaign two years ago. Other witnesses yesterday included Castaneda's aide, Linda Wagner, and a friend, Daniel Hernandez.

O'Toole, who is head of the Public Integrity Unit of the District Attorney's Office, began investigating Castaneda based on a tip that Castaneda used his position to receive free rent or a discount in 2005 on a converted condominium from Israni, president of Pacifica Cos. O'Toole found no evidence of wrongdoing.

Castaneda didn't make an offer or purchase one of the condos, but O'Toole believes he once intended to buy one.

During the investigation, Castaneda repeatedly said under oath that he never intended to buy a condominium or receive favors from Israni, which led to the perjury charges.

O'Toole also had charged Castaneda with two unrelated misdemeanors, saying he didn't disclose income on state-required forms for elected officials. This trial addresses only the perjury. O'Toole said he might drop the other charges.

This is the Public Integrity Unit's first trial since it was established two years ago. O'Toole has charged one other person, also for perjury. That case ended with a misdemeanor guilty plea last year.

Castaneda has described O'Toole's investigation as a "political witch hunt" intended to prevent him from winning re-election. He said last year that District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis, O'Toole's boss, sought to damage his reputation and help his rival, Chula Vista Mayor Cheryl Cox.

Dumanis has declined to comment on those statements.