

FOIA Uncovers Misuse of Taxpayer Dollars by McLean County Clerk Kathy Michael

MCLEAN COUNTY DEMOCRATS · TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2018

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McLean County Clerk Kathy Michael is holding a press conference this evening to address what she calls “continual lies” and “disturbing and deliberate false statements”. We look forward to hearing her address these issues, since much of her recent behavior raises questions about her own professionalism and integrity.

In particular, we seek clarity on two issues. First, we hope she addresses the inconsistency of purporting to be a “watchdog for the taxpayers” while conducting personal and political business on their dime. A FOIA request made by local counsel for her computer search history reveals that Clerk Michael may have been using county equipment and county time to advance her political campaign, a violation of the Illinois State Officials and Employees Ethics Act, which states “State employees shall not intentionally misappropriate any State property or resources by engaging in any prohibited political activity for the benefit of any campaign for elective office or any political organization” (5 ILCS 430/5-15).” The incidents below provide evidence that far from looking out for taxpayers, Clerk Michael has been looking out for herself and her personal and political interests.

In July 2018, Clerk Michael engaged in the following activity while working for the county:

- 7/2/18: Viewed [post](#) on her reelection Facebook page (row 510)
- 7/2/18: Searched for the McLean County Democrats on Facebook (row 567)
- 7/2/18: Checked insights (i.e. reader engagement) on her reelection Facebook page (row 629)
- 7/3/18: Viewed Richards’ Fourth of July Facebook event, then viewed the [following blog post](#), which opposes Richards’ campaign (rows 695, 750, 753, 792)
- 7/6/18: Donated to the 20 Stars for Life [benefit](#) (rows 806–09)
- 7/6/18: Viewed WGLT’s Election 2018 in McLean County [Facebook page](#)
- 7/6/18: Viewed the Facebook profile of Dan Augstin, a registered Democrat (row 962)
- 7/6/18: Viewed meet and greet Facebook event for Richards, then viewed her own reelection Facebook page. Eleven minutes later after searching for Richards’ campaign Facebook page, viewed [the following blog post](#) about Richards’ campaign contributions. Two minutes later, viewed BLN News on Twitter (rows 998, 1065, 1067, 1090, 1094)

- 7/6/18: Viewed WGLT's Election 2018 in McLean County Facebook page, viewed Bloomington Election Commission [Referendum Petitioning event](#) from McLean County Libertarian party, viewed the McLean County Libertarians' website, then searched for Nikita Richards for McLean County Board on Facebook (rows 1236, 1241, 1249, 1251, 1288, 1311)
- 7/9/18: Viewed her reelection Facebook page and two minutes later searched "who have i blocked" in Facebook Help (rows 1362, 1366)
- 7/10/18: Viewed inbox, notifications, and settings for reelection Facebook page (rows 1376–93)
- 7/10/18: Googled "i have 3 facebook accounts i don't want to block everyone from every account" and, one minute later, viewed [Adweek article](#) on Facebook privacy. Then checked settings on [official County Clerk Facebook page](#) (rows 1439, 1442, 1474)
- 7/10/18: Viewed Richards' [fundraising event](#) on Facebook (rows 1521, 1580)
- 7/10/18: Viewed campaign disclosures and latest totals by candidates on Illinois State Board of Election website (rows 1674–1702), Googled "WHEN WAS MY POLITICAL QUARTERLY FILING DUE IN IL" (row 1705), then viewed [campaign disclosure document](#) (row 1708)
- 7/11/18: Viewed Richards' campaign page on Facebook (rows 1783, 1805)
- 7/11/18: Viewed [post](#) on her reelection Facebook page (row 1893)
- 7/11/18: Viewed 11th Annual Sing for Wishes [website](#), on which she was a [donor](#) for Make-A-Wish Foundation (rows 1928–30), logged into account for Make-A-Wish Illinois (rows 1931–38), then accessed donation form for Make-A-Wish (rows 1943–61). Earlier in the day, Michaels had [shared Make-A-Wish fundraiser](#) from her campaign reelection page. She continued to view Make-A-Wish donations on July 12th (rows 2256–2305)
- 7/12/18: Viewed Richards' campaign page on Facebook (row 2196)

The second issue we hope she addresses in her press conference about truth and transparency is her pattern of transgressing against the First Amendment rights of McLean County residents with whom she disagrees. Sadly, we also have evidence obtained through a FOIA request that Clerk Michael blocked several individuals from viewing the County Clerk's public Facebook page, that is, the page of the office and not Michael's personal or campaign Facebook page. In this digital age, access to platforms such as Facebook are essential to engaged citizenship and free speech. Again, we are hopeful Clerk Michael can explain why she chose to curtail residents' access to this vital tool of democratic engagement.

We encourage Clerk Michael to explain this behavior to the taxpayers of McLean County.

For further information, please contact :

Patrick Cortesi

Communication Chair, McLean County Democrats

Sources:

1. FOIA request
2. FOIA Response:
 - A) “The complete internet browsing history for County Clerk Kathy Michael for any County-owned computer, tablet, smart phone or internet-connected device from May 15, 2018 - July 12, 2018
 - B) A copy of the Banned People and pages, listing all individuals who have been banned from the page by those managing the “McLean County Clerk - Kathy Michael” Facebook page. A list of all banned persons and pages is requested.

WGLT The Pantagraph WJBC