

MEMO

From: Michael G. Butts

To: McLean County State's Attorney Erika Reynolds and the McLean County Board

Re: Allegations raised by Trevor Sierra

Dated: February 11, 2025

I. INVESTIGATION

A. Scope of Investigation

I was retained by McLean County State's Attorney, Erika Reynolds, on December 17, 2024, to investigate the allegations raised by Trevor Sierra concerning unethical political activity perpetrated by McLean County Administrator, Cassy Taylor and McLean County Board Member, Elizabeth "Lizzy" Johnston at the McLean County Government Center. My investigation was limited specifically to the allegations raised by Mr. Sierra.

Mr. Sierra raised allegations of inappropriate political activity conducted by Ms. Taylor and Ms. Johnston in an email sent to the McLean County Board on November 28, 2024, at 9:05 a.m. Attached hereto and incorporated herein as Exhibit "A" is the email sent by Mr. Sierra. In that email he alleges that on or about Thursday, September 5, 2024, Ms. Taylor approached him about making a personal donation to support a political action committee ("PAC") formed for the purposes of supporting the referendum to eliminate the office of County Auditor. In that conversation, Ms. Taylor stated that County Board Member, Ms. Johnston, would be coming through the County Administrators office to collect donations from any employees who wish to contribute, and that the PAC rules allowed for cash donations to be anonymous if they were limited to \$149.00 per person or \$298.00 per couple.

Mr. Sierra alleges that Ms. Taylor reminded him on September 10, 2024, about the donations and that Ms. Johnston would be coming through to pick them up later that week. Mr.

Sierra claimed that Ms. Taylor was calling Assistant County Administrator Cathy Dreyer to offer to make a cash donation on her behalf while Ms. Dreyer was on vacation in Mexico. Allegedly Ms. Dreyer would reimburse Ms. Taylor upon her return.

Mr. Sierra alleges that two days after that conversation he provided Ms. Johnston with a cash envelope containing \$298.00 on behalf of him and his spouse.

Mr. Sierra wrote that on September 19, 2024 he was again approached by Ms. Taylor stating that the fundraising efforts were not satisfactory and was asked to call Ms. Reynolds to inquire whether she, Judge Don Knapp or any of their political allies would contribute to the PAC. Mr. Sierra wrote that Ms. Taylor stated, "If asked about this conversation, I will lie."

Mr. Sierra alleged that he called Ms. Reynolds that same day at Ms. Taylor's request. Alleging Ms. Reynolds had questions regarding the PAC that he could not answer, she asked Mr. Sierra to ask Ms. Johnston for contact information for the PAC. Mr. Sierra alleges he then provided Ms. Reynolds with a name and telephone number that was provided to him by Ms. Johnston.

Mr. Sierra alleges that on or about October 2, 2024, Ms. Taylor solicited a contribution for a third time stating that the PAC was short of its goal of promotional materials. That day or shortly thereafter Mr. Sierra provided Ms. Johnston with another \$200.00 in cash.

Mr. Sierra alleges that all conversations and solicitations he took place within the McLean County Government Center located at 114 E. Washington, Bloomington, Illinois.

B. Statutory and Code Authority

The relevant sections of the McLean County Code are McLean County Code Chapter 108 Personnel Policies and Procedures, Article VIII, Section 109, and McLean County Code Chapter 37 Ethics, Section 32. These sections state:

“§ 108-109 Restriction on political activities.

No County employee shall engage in political activities during working hours. No County employee shall use his or her position or the authority of his or her office to solicit contributions or any other support of partisan political activities. No County employee will be intimidated into supporting or contributing to partisan political activities. Any violation of this rule is cause for suspension or dismissal. Outside of working hours, there shall be no restriction on political activities, except employees under federal grants covered by the Hatch Act.”

§37-1 Definitions.

Prohibited Political Activities defined:

- A. Preparing for, organizing, or participating in any political meeting, political rally, political demonstration, or other political event.
- B. Soliciting contributions, including but not limited to the purchase of, selling, distributing, or receiving payment for tickets for any political fund-raiser, political meeting, or other political event.
- C. Soliciting, planning the solicitation of, or preparing any document or report regarding anything of value intended as a campaign contribution.
- I. Making contributions on behalf of any candidate for elective office in that capacity or in connection with a campaign for elective office.
- L. Campaigning for any elective office or for/against any referendum question.

§ 37-2 Prohibited political activities.

For purposes of this chapter, the following are prohibited political activities:

- A. No officer or employee shall intentionally perform any prohibited political activity during any compensated time, as defined herein. No officer or employee shall intentionally use any property or resources of McLean County in connection with any prohibited political activity.

§ 37-7 Penalties.

A. Types of offenses.

- (1) A person is guilty of a Class A misdemeanor if that person intentionally violates any provision of § 37-2 of this chapter.
- (3) Any person who intentionally makes a false report alleging a violation of any provision of this chapter to the Ethics Commission of McLean County, to the State's Attorney or any other law enforcement official is guilty of a Class A misdemeanor.”

The relevant portion of Illinois law is 55 ILCS 5/3-14033-14036, commonly referred to as the Counties Code. These sections state:

55 ILCS 5/3-14033. Soliciting or receiving political contributions prohibited. No officer or employee in the classified civil service of said county, or named in Section 3-14022, shall solicit, orally or by letter, or receive or pay, or be in any

manner concerned in soliciting, receiving or paying any assessments, subscriptions or contributions for any party or political purposes whatever.

55 ILCS 5/3-14034. Solicitation of political contributions from officers or employees prohibited. No person shall solicit orally or by letter, or be in any manner concerned in soliciting any assessment, contribution or payment, for any party or for any political purpose whatever, from any officer or employee in the classified civil service of said county, or named in Section 3-14022.

55 ILCS 5/3-14035. Soliciting or delivering political contributions in public offices forbidden. No person shall in any room or building occupied for the discharge of official duties by any officer or employee in the classified civil service of said county, or named in Section 3-14022, solicit, orally or by written communication, deliver therein or in any other manner, or receive any contribution of money or other thing of value, for any party or political purpose whatever. No officer, agent, clerk or employee in the classified civil service of said county, or named in Section 3-14022, who may have charge or control of any building, office or room occupied for any purpose of said government, shall permit any person to enter the same for the purpose of therein soliciting or delivering written solicitations for, or receiving or giving notice of any political assessments.

55 ILCS 5/3-14036. Payments of political contributions to public officers prohibited. No officer or employee in the classified civil service of said county, or named in Section 3-14022, shall directly or indirectly, give or hand over to any officer or employee, or to any senator or representative or alderperson, councilman, or commissioner, any money or other valuable thing on account of or to be applied to the promotion of any party or political object whatever.”

C. Investigation Timeline

i. Interviews

On December 17, 2024, I met with Ms. Reynolds and Assistant State’s Attorneys, Taylor Williams and Don Rood to be briefed on the allegations raised, and their knowledge of the events and parties involved.

The afternoon of December 17, 2024, I had the opportunity to interview Judge Don Knapp concerning the allegations and his past experience working with Mr. Sierra.

On December 18, 2024, I met with and conducted interviews of the entire McLean County Administration Office with the exception of Ms. Taylor. This included:

- Anthony Grant, Assistant County Administrator
- Cathy Dreyer Assistant County Administrator
- Julie Morlock, County Executive Coordinator
- Sarah Vock, Administrative Project Specialist
- Don Rood, First Assistant State's Attorney, Civil Division
- Taylor Williams, Assistant State's Attorney, Civil Division
- Amy Baker, Human Resources Coordinator
- Rachel Neisler, Human Resources Benefits Specialist
- Kyle Mueller, Human Resources Recruiting and Training Specialist
- Gary Wayne Wilkes, County Risk Manager

On December 20, 2024, I interviewed Ms. Taylor at the McLean County Government Center after interviewing Ms. Reynolds at the McLean County Law and Justice Center.

On December 29, 2024, I reached out to Mr. Sierra by email to ask if he would sit down for an interview. He responded that day indicating he did not believe that would be a problem but that he would be in touch. On December 30, 2024, I followed up with Mr. Sierra via email regarding his availability. He responded that after consulting with his attorney he was declining to sit for an interview. On January 2, 2025, I sent him a follow up email asking if he would be willing to provide any documentation that he believed corroborated his claims. I never received a response to that email. Attached hereto and incorporated herein as Exhibit "B" are the emails requesting an interview.

On January 8, 2025, I interviewed Ms. Johnston over zoom. On January 9, 2025, I spoke with McLean County Board Members Beverly Bell, Lea Cline and former member Susan

Schafer concerning the allegations and to corroborate details I learned in the investigation. On January 10, 2025, I spoke to McLean County Board Member Jim Rogal for the same purpose.

ii. Documents Reviewed

On December 17, 2024, I researched and reviewed all media publications concerning the allegations, focusing on those where Mr. Sierra gave statements. Mr. Sierra told WGLT "In my opinion, what has happened was wrong and it's important for the public and for any authorities that may be interested to look into these facts and make their own conclusions about what should happen thereafter." "Former McLean County official wants ethics probe over alleged fundraising tied to auditor referendum." Eric Stock, WGLT, December 1, 2024. <https://www.wglc.org/local-news/2024-12-01/former-mclean-county-official-wants-ethics-probe-over-alleged-fundraising-tied-to-auditor-referendum>, attached hereto and incorporated herein as Exhibit "C" is the WGLT article. The article went on to state Sierra said he felt he was "probably wrong" in making the contribution to the PAC, and said Johnston also was "probably wrong" in accepting the contribution, "I lay the fault on both of us in that realm." "Sierra said he's not jumping to any conclusions about what actions, if any, should be taken in the matter, but he believes the public has a right to know."

While conducting these interviews I had the McLean County IT Department conduct email searches of Ms. Taylor and Mr. Sierra's emails, looking for emails they sent each other, and emails containing the key words "PAC", "referendum", "donation", and "auditor". I also had them search for emails they sent from their work email to their personal emails. I was provided with the results from Mr. Sierra's emails on December 23, 2024, and Ms. Taylor's emails on December 26, 2024.

I made an informal FOIA request to Assistant State's Attorney Williams for the same search from Ms. Johnston's emails. I was able to review the requested documents from all requested sources. Ms. Johnston also provided text messages between her and Mr. Sierra that showed the surrounding context of the text messages Mr. Sierra provided to the media.

D. FACTS

A. Mr. Sierra's Position

Mr. Sierra was appointed the First Assistant State's Attorney of the Civil Division in the spring of 2023. [REDACTED]. In addition to his employment, he was the County's Chief Ethics Officer and the parliamentarian for the Ethics Commission under McLean County Code Chapter 37 sections §37-4-§37-5. Had a complaint been raised addressing the alleged unethical political activity, Mr. Sierra would have worked with the Commission to investigate the matter and refer it to the McLean County State's Attorney for formal charges.

B. Factual Discrepancies with Allegations Raised

Mr. Sierra alleged that Ms. Dreyer was in Mexico during one of his conversations with Ms. Taylor. Ms. Dreyer was on vacation in Alabama. She was in Mexico in May of 2024. Mr. Dreyer provided me with social media posts from her vacations, and let me view her passport, showing she visited Mexico in May. Ms. Dreyer also provided her emails and text messages with Ms. Taylor during that time period. All communications were related to her request for information from a citizen concerning the budget.

Mr. Sierra alleged that Ms. Taylor asked him to call Ms. Reynolds to see if she could get Judge Knapp and their political allies to possibly donate. Mr. Sierra personally called Judge Knapp and asked for a donation. Ms. Reynolds denies being asked by Mr. Sierra about Judge

Knapp. Ms. Reynolds was unaware that Mr. Sierra called Judge Knapp and solicited a donation until speaking with me during this investigation.

Ms. Reynolds denies that Mr. Sierra mentioned Ms. Johnston or Ms. Taylor on his phone call. Ms. Reynolds stated she was uncomfortable donating to a PAC she knew nothing about and donating would be bad optics given the auditor was a client, she declined to donate and contact her political allies. Mr. Sierra provided Ms. Reynolds with information regarding the PAC when he reached out to her a second time asking that she contact her political allies. She again declined to donate and contact her political allies.

Judge Knapp stated that Mr. Sierra contacted him directly to ask for a donation. Judge Knapp declined to donate as there was a chance he would be assigned to hear any cases brought pursuant to the election results. Mr. Sierra made a snarky remark to him that he “was unaware you (Judge Knapp) were such a big fan of the auditor.” Mr. Sierra did not mention reaching out to Ms. Reynolds when he spoke to Judge Knapp.

C. Interviews with County Administration Office Employees

Not a single employee of the McLean County Administration Office stated they were ever asked for a donation for the auditor referendum or for any political cause by Ms. Taylor or Ms. Johnston. Not a single employee of the Mclean County Administration Office stated that they overheard anyone being asked for a donation by Ms. Taylor or Ms. Johnston.

Not a single employee of the McLean County Administration Office was ever told to vote in a particular way on the auditor referendum or any other election by Ms. Taylor or Ms. Johnston. None were asked how they were going to vote. None were offered political materials or told to take yard signs or other political materials. There was no pressure on employees to vote in a specific way or attempts to persuade employees to vote in a particular manner.

From the interviews, it was clear that Ms. Taylor never discussed how to vote on the auditor referendum with any employees of the McLean County Administration Office. The only conversations concerning the referendum were practical conversations regarding what steps the administration office would have to take if the referendum was passed to fill the hole created by the elimination of the auditor office. These conversations were not inappropriate.

The only conversation that occurred regarding the PAC established to support the referendum happened between Mr. Sierra, Ms. Taylor, and Ms. Dreyer. This conversation took place in Ms. Taylor's office. Ms. Taylor told Mr. Sierra that she had become aware of this PAC. She asked him how PACs work, asked him for his legal opinion and advice on the PAC, and if the County Administration Office needed to be ready for any issues. This conversation did not include any request for donations. It was limited to the legal procedural operation of a PAC. This version of events was corroborated by both Ms. Taylor and Ms. Dreyer. They both stated that they believed this conversation was not inappropriate because it was based purely upon a practical discussion of the PAC, and because Mr. Sierra was the Chief Ethics Officer. Ms. Dreyer commented that she initially found it awkward to discuss a political issue in the office, but relied upon Mr. Sierra's participation in determining the conversation was appropriate.

Ms. Dreyer relayed that she recalls Mr. Sierra unprompted, stating that he needed to get a hold of Ms. Johnston to donate. This was the only conversation concerning donations any employee of the McLean County Administration Office recalled.

The only other mention of the referendum in the office was as the election neared. Employees would mention that they would see a lot of signs supporting the referendum, and speculated on whether it would pass.

No employee ever recalls Ms. Johnston coming through the office to collect donations. Multiple employees of the McLean County Administration Office had never met Ms. Johnston until December 18, 2024. The remainder had only engaged in minimal interaction with her. Notably Amy Baker had taken her headshots for the Board.

Julie Morlock is the County Executive Coordinator. Her desk is located in an area of the McLean County Administration Office with the most foot traffic. Visitors have to walk by her desk. She never witnessed Ms. Johnston come to the office to collect donations. Ms. Johnston would only come in to check her mail or to speak with Ms. Taylor or Mr. Sierra prior to meetings. She never came to the office and went from desk to desk. Her coming to the office to collect donations from employees would have been uncharacteristic behavior that would have stuck out to her.

Every witness I interviewed spoke highly of Ms. Taylor, stating she was professional, and honest. No board members or former board members found the allegations believable based upon their personal experiences with Ms. Taylor. No one recalled her ever discussing politics in the office. Board members of both political parties spoke highly of her and found the allegations to not be credible.

The majority of the McLean County Administration Office could not give me their impression of Ms. Johnston as they had not had enough interactions with her, most not having formally met her until after the election. Every witness I interviewed who had interacted extensively with Ms. Johnston stated she was ethical. No board members or former board members found the allegations credible based upon their personal experiences with Ms. Johnston. Many remarked that she was borderline overly concerned with making sure all ethical rules were followed. It was noted by multiple witnesses that when they asked her for campaign

materials, she remarked she would not bring any yard signs or any campaign materials into the government center. When she was asked for yard signs at outside events, she would tell people they could get them from her car, but she would not bring them into the building.

D. Interviews with Ms. Taylor, Ms. Johnston, and Mr. Sierra.

i. Cassy Taylor

Ms. Taylor emphatically denies the allegations raised by Mr. Sierra. She stated she has never engaged in any political solicitation and never engaged in political discussions with employees. Her discussions with her office concerning the auditor referendum were limited to being prepared if the referendum passed, and speculating on if it would pass due to the number of signs observed in town. The speculation was related to being prepared to handle the potential elimination of the auditor office. When I spoke with her she was open with her answers, and spoke with conviction. She came across as a credible witness.

ii. Elizabeth Johnston

Ms. Johnston denies the allegations raised by Mr. Sierra. When I spoke with her, she was not evasive and came across as a credible witness. It should also be noted that during the time Mr. Sierra alleges she undertook all these actions she was running her two businesses and her own campaign. Her available time to spearhead fundraising for the auditor referendum when she had to focus on her professional and board duties, her family life, and her own campaign was extremely limited.

Ms. Johnston stated that twice while leaving board meetings, Mr. Sierra handed her envelopes without any statements about what they contained. When she got home, she realized they were cash donations. She had not asked him for donations prior to these incidents.

The two of them had no prior conversations regarding the donations prior to his text message requesting a refund. They had no prior conversations about any alleged inappropriate conduct. She disagrees that the donations were illegal or unethical but did not want any issues so reached out to her contact to see if a refund could be issued. The text messages I reviewed corroborate those claims.

Ms. Johnston had not met the majority of the McLean County Administration office until December 2024. Outside of speaking with Ms. Taylor and the Assistant Administrators, the few conversations she engaged in with employees prior to that was small talk and the exchange of pleasantries.

iii. Trevor Sierra

It cannot be overlooked that Mr. Sierra raised these allegations via email, told the media he welcomed an investigation, and has declined to participate in the investigative process. He declined to provide an interview or any documentation to support his claims. Because of this I have no direct evidence from Mr. Sierra to support his claims. I was not able to obtain further details concerning his claims. I was unable to hear his version of events and attempt to verify it in interviews with the other witnesses. Importantly, in terms of evaluating the validity of his claims I was not able to form a first-hand impression of his character, credibility, or motivations.

In light of this, I learned of incidents that cast doubts on Mr. Sierra's credibility. Members of the McLean County Administration Office and the McLean County Board told me that they did not trust Mr. Sierra personally or professionally. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Some notable incidents include:

- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Throughout his tenure, Mr. Sierra did not respond to any FOIA requests except for one, specifically a request from local media regarding the auditor referendum. When he was informed that it was not done in the timeframe he wished for, he became angry with the Assistant State's Attorney and stated he would do the work himself. After the FOIA request was responded to, it was reviewed and discovered it was not properly redacted by Mr. Sierra and was now a public record that could not be corrected. In response he stated the public needed to be aware of the issues with the auditor.

- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]

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• [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Unfortunately, I have no personal interaction to counter the information and incidents relayed to me concerning Mr. Sierra. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]. These referenced incidents were all corroborated by multiple witnesses.

E. Documentary Evidence

The emails and text messages reviewed contained no mention of the PAC, how to vote on the auditor referendum, or any requests for donations to the campaign. There was no discussion whatsoever about fundraising, campaign materials, or anything that would be a violation of McLean County Code provisions or State Law.

Nothing in the documents reviewed corroborated any of Mr. Sierra's claims.

F. McLean County Administration Office Layout

The McLean County Administration Office is located on the 4th floor of the McLean County Government Center. The office is located on the east side of the building and has an open-air floor plan. The individual office spaces along the east wall have glass walls facing the interior of the office. The interior is visible to all workers from their desks.

It is unlikely, if not impossible, that Ms. Johnston could have come around the office to collect donations from employees without it being observed by an employee in the office. Not a single employee stated they have ever observed this behavior.

G. FINDINGS

A. Analysis

My investigation revealed no evidence that corroborates any of the claims made by Mr. Sierra concerning illegal or unethical conduct committed by Ms. Taylor or Ms. Johnston. My investigation did not reveal any evidence of any wrongdoing by Ms. Taylor or Ms. Johnston. Ms. Taylor and Ms. Johnston vehemently denied the claims. No witnesses provided statements that in any way corroborated Mr. Sierra's claims or cast doubt upon the positions taken by Ms. Taylor and Ms. Johnston. Not a single witness found the allegations credible, or consistent with any prior actions taken by Ms. Taylor or Ms. Johnston.

Without Mr. Sierra's involvement I am left to exclusively rely upon the testimony of those who participated in the investigation (which was called for by Mr. Sierra), available documentary evidence, and my impressions of the credibility of the witnesses. After raising his claims via email and publicly calling for an investigation through the media, Mr. Sierra did not participate in any capacity in this investigation.

As such, the only wrongdoing I could substantiate was that admitted to by Mr. Sierra. Mr. Sierra sought out Ms. Johnston to make donations. Mr. Sierra attempted to discuss donations with co-workers. Mr. Sierra solicited donations from Judge Don Knapp and McLean County State's Attorney Erika Reynolds. As the Chief Ethics Officer and Civil Division First Assistant State's Attorney, the employees and officers of McLean County relied upon him to advise them if their conduct was approaching ethical violations and to ensure they did not cross the line. Instead, Mr. Sierra himself engaged in the behavior he complains of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

B. Conclusion

The evidence reviewed and information provided to me does not substantiate the allegations raised by Mr. Sierra, or present probable cause of any actions in violation of either state law or county code committed by Ms. Taylor or Ms. Johnston. I do not recommend any action be taken against Ms. Taylor or Ms. Johnston by the McLean County Ethics Commission or McLean County State's Attorney.

[REDACTED]

Subject: Information regarding County Administrator Cassy Taylor

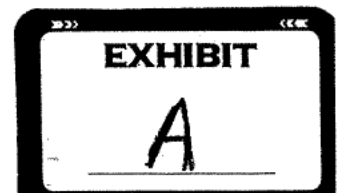
CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Honorable Members of the McLean County Board and County Auditor Michelle Anderson:

I regret to inform you of unethical conduct arising from the Office of the County Administrator over the course of the last three months. After the County Board adopted a referendum to eliminate the office of McLean County Auditor, Ms. Taylor used her position as County Administrator to orchestrate political activities intended to promote the passage of the referendum. Such political activity includes the solicitation of funds from County employees for a political action committee established to support the referendum.

On or about Thursday, September 5, 2024, Ms. Taylor first approached me on the subject of making such a personal donation. She stated that County Board member Elizabeth Johnston would be coming through the County Administrator's office to collect donations from any employees who desired to contribute. She stated that the political action committee rules allowed for cash donations of up to \$149 per person, or \$298 per couple without any names being published.

Ms. Taylor asked for a second time about a donation on or about Tuesday, September 10th reminding me and other staff members in the Administrator's Office



that Ms. Johnston would be coming through the office to pickup donations later that week. My recollection is that Assistant County Administrator Cathy Dreyer was on vacation in Mexico, but Ms. Taylor called and offered to make a cash contribution on behalf of Ms. Dreyer which could be repaid upon Ms. Dreyer's return. About two days thereafter, I provided Ms. Johnston with a cash envelope containing approximately \$298 on behalf of myself and my spouse.

On Thursday, September 19, Ms. Taylor stated that fundraising efforts were not satisfactory and asked me to call State's Attorney Erika Reynolds to inquire whether Circuit Judge Don Knapp or other allies would be willing to contribute to the PAC. Ms. Taylor explicitly stated, "If asked about this conversation, I will lie." I called Ms. Reynolds that same day, Thursday, September 19, per Ms. Taylor's request. Ms. Reynolds had questions regarding the PAC that I could not answer, so she asked me to ask Ms. Johnston for a contact. I provided Ms. Reynolds with a name and telephone number that had been provided to me by Ms. Johnston.

On or about Wednesday, October 2nd, Ms. Taylor solicited a contribution for a third time, stating that the PAC was short of an established goal for promotional materials. That day or shortly thereafter, I provided Ms. Johnston with another \$200 in cash. All solicitations described herein took place at the Government Center located at 115 E. Washington Street. No promises or threats were made regarding the contributions. I regret my participation in these activities and offer my sincere apologies to County Auditor Michelle Anderson, each of you, and most importantly, the taxpayers of McLean County.

Sincerely yours,
Trevor Sierra



Michael Butts

From: Michael Butts
Sent: Thursday, January 2, 2025 11:30 AM
To: Trevor Sierra
Subject: RE: County Administrator/PAC Allegations

Trevor,

Do you have any documentation you can share with me that corroborates you claims?

The remainder of your text conversations with Lizzie Johnston? Texts or emails with her or Cassy Taylor?

Michael G. Butts

Attorney

WOOD, DeVARY, ARMSTRONG, HOUSKA & BUTTS, P.C.

207 West Jefferson Street, Suite 400

Bloomington, Illinois 61701

Telephone: 309.827.0044

Facsimile: 309.829.0328

mbutts@wdalawyers.com



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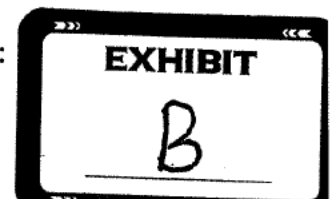
From: Trevor Sierra [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, December 30, 2024 10:52 AM
To: Michael Butts <mbutts@WDALAWYERS.com>
Subject: Re: County Administrator/PAC Allegations

Hi Michael,

Apologies for the delay in getting back to you. Regretfully, on the advice of counsel, I cannot participate in an interview at this time.

Respectfully yours,
Trevor

On Mon, Dec 30, 2024 at 10:12 AM Michael Butts <mbutts@wdalawyers.com> wrote:



Trevor,

Just following up.

Thank you,

Michael G. Butts

Attorney

WOOD, DEVARY, ARMSTRONG & HOUSKA, P.C.

207 West Jefferson Street, Suite 400

Bloomington, Illinois 61701

Telephone: 309.827.0044

Facsimile: 309.829.0328

mbutts@wdalawyers.com



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From: Trevor Sierra [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, December 19, 2024 4:59 PM
To: Michael Butts <mbutts@WDALAWYERS.com>
Subject: Re: County Administrator/PAC Allegations

Mr. Butts,

Thank you for reaching out. I've retained counsel for purposes of resolving my separation from the County, but from my perspective, that issue is independent from the conduct addressed in my email to the County Board. I'll inform counsel of your request and as long as they are not concerned about my participation, I'll be happy to schedule a time to meet within the timeframe you suggest. I'll be back in touch as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Trevor Sierra

On Thu, Dec 19, 2024 at 4:34 PM Michael Butts <mbutts@wdalawyers.com> wrote:

Mr. Sierra,

I have been retained to conduct an investigation into the allegations raised in the email you sent to the McLean County Board on November 28, 2024. As part of my investigation, I would like to sit down with you to discuss the allegations you raised.

If possible, I would prefer to sit down in the next two weeks. If you have retained an attorney that you would prefer I direct communications through, please let me know.

Regards,

Michael G. Butts

Attorney/Partner

WOOD, DEVARY, ARMSTRONG & HOUSKA, P.C.

207 West Jefferson Street, Suite 400

Bloomington, Illinois 61701

Telephone: 309.827.0044

Facsimile: 309.829.0328

mbutts@wdalawyers.com



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Former McLean County official wants ethics probe over alleged fundraising tied to auditor referendum

WGLT | By Eric Stock

Published December 1, 2024 at 1:10 PM CST

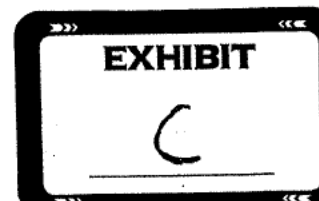
Updated December 2, 2024 at 8:04 AM CST



Colin Hardman / WGLT File

McLean County Administrator Cassy Taylor allegedly solicited funds for a referendum to eliminate the county's elected auditor position, according to former McLean County assistant state's attorney Trevor Sierra, left.

Updated: December 1, 2024 at 4:31 PM CST



McLean County State's Attorney Erika Reynolds said she would welcome an external investigation into the matter but her office is still reviewing the allegations.



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A former McLean County official said he plans to contact the Illinois Attorney General's Office regarding an ethics complaint he's lodged against the county administrator.

Trevor Sierra, who until recently was the lead civil attorney in the McLean County State's Attorney's Office, alleges County Administrator Cassy Taylor used her role to fundraise on behalf of a ballot initiative to eliminate the county's elected auditor position.

That referendum failed in the November election, despite having mostly bipartisan support from McLean County Board members.

In an email sent to county board members and obtained by WGLT, Sierra claimed Taylor approached him on three occasions to ask if he would make a personal donation to a political action committee [PAC] in support of the referendum. The funding was to pay for promotional materials, Sierra said.

Sierra, who was working in the state's attorney's office at the time, would not discuss the nature of his employment ending with the office. He said he gave \$298 on behalf of himself and his wife. He was told that was the maximum amount he could give without having his name published. Sierra said he later gave another \$200 and has since asked for his money to be refunded.

"No promises or threats were made regarding these contributions. I regret my participation in these activities and offer my sincere apologies to County Auditor Michelle Anderson, each of you, and most importantly, to the taxpayers of McLean County," Sierra said in an email to the county board.

Taylor has not responded to a request for comment.

McLean County State's Attorney Erika Reynolds said in an email on Sunday her office is reviewing "next steps" and anticipates an external investigation "which our office welcomes."

"Of course allegations such as these are taken very seriously by both the [county] board and my office," said Reynolds, adding she became aware of the allegations Sierra raised in his email to the board after his "separation of employment" from the state's attorney's office.

Sierra said Taylor indicated on two occasions that county board vice-chair Elizabeth Johnston would be coming through the county administration office to collect donations for the PAC.

Sierra said on Sept. 19, Taylor asked him to call Reynolds to "inquire whether Circuit Judge Don Knapp or other allies would be willing to contribute to the PAC." He said Taylor said, "If asked about this conversation, I will lie."

Sierra said Reynolds had questions about the PAC that he could not answer. He said Reynolds then asked him to ask Johnston for a contact, which he said Johnston provided.

McLean County code forbids any county employee from engaging in political activities during work hours and any violation is grounds for suspension or dismissal.

"No county employee shall use his or her position or the authority of his or her office to solicit contributions or any other support of partisan political activities," the code states.

Sierra said he felt he was "probably wrong" in making the contribution to the PAC, and said Johnston also was "probably wrong" in accepting the contribution.

"I lay the fault on both of us in that realm," Sierra said.

Sierra said he's not jumping to any conclusions about what actions, if any, should be taken in the matter, but he believes the public has a right to know.

"In my opinion, what has happened was wrong and it's important for the public and for any authorities that may be interested to look into these facts and make their own conclusions about what should happen thereafter," Sierra told WGLT.

Johnston said she would support an investigation into the matter.

"Given the nature of the allegations, I think it's proper for an investigation of the facts to be initiated following the proper channels," Johnston said.

Outgoing Republican county board member Chuck Erickson also has called for an investigation. He blamed county board leadership, including Johnston and board chair Catherine Metsker for lacking better controls.

"The end does not justify the means. You guys got sloppy and you thought the law did not apply to you and you thought you were above it," Erickson said. "You thought your pursuit of that auditor's referendum was more important than any other consideration."

Metsker said via email that the matter was a personnel issue.

"I will not make comments regarding any topics involving current or former county employees," she said.

Several county board members and candidates advocated for the auditor's office to be eliminated, claiming it would save the county money without sacrificing any financial oversight, given that the county also hires outside auditors.

The McLean County's Board unanimous vote in June to leave the issue up to the voters came after several county officials claimed Anderson was responsible for several late county payments.

Anderson, who has been the county's auditor since 2007, was re-elected in November. Her office has now survived two public votes to eliminate the office.

"I have no comment beyond looking forward to an independent investigation of these allegations," Anderson said via email.

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Eric Stock

Eric Stock is the News Director at WGLT. You can contact Eric at ejstoc1@ilstu.edu.

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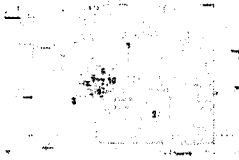
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