

Dear Chairman Golden & Members of the Political Committee,

Thank you for the work you and the SEC do each day to keep Tennessee red and growing the Republican party. I appreciate your time and willingness to serve our Republican family.

As introduction for those reading this, and whom I may not know, let me tell you a little about my Republican involvement: I am the former Chairman of the Williamson County Republican Party, I was Statesman-of-the-Year nominated by Mark Green, I was a delegate to the RNC in 2016, and I have served in various seats on the Board of the Republican Women of Williamson County and I am a long-standing Chairman's Circle member.

This is the third convention I have Chaired. Most recently I chaired the caucus for the open District 10 County Commission seat. I was asked to Chair the Reorganization because of my experience and because of the positive feedback the Party received from previous candidates based on issues of transparency and overall voter experience. I will address each allegation leveled by the Williamson County Conservative (WCC) ticket individually below.

However, if I may, I would prefer to first make a few points of clarification for a summary that clarifies the more serious charges and adds additional information:

- One accusation is that bona fide Republican's were denied their right to vote at the convention. In essence, the WCC is alleging that you, Mr. Golden, and or the SEC members, intentionally denied Republican's the right to vote. Did you or the SEC Members, in fact, do this?
- Representatives of both slates and SEC Members were present for the tabulation of the vote. Everyone watched Election Commissioner Duda put the ballots in a storage box, count the spoiled ballots, and seal them with packing tape in an envelope. Shortly after the election results were announced, Brian Floyd, Campaign Manager for the WCC ticket requested a recount.
- On election night there were 1,555 votes: 795 for Mr. Hickey and 751 for Mr. Clifford. On recount the paper ballots were divided by candidate and then broken into stacks of 25. Mr. Clifford had 30 stacks of 25 for 750 votes (Clifford lost one vote), Mr. Hickey had 31 stacks plus 23 ballots for 798 votes(Hickey gained 3 votes). Six ballots did not have a vote for chairman which totaled 1554 ballots. Brian Floyd, WCC campaign manager, accepted the results and agreed Mr. Hickey won the election. There have been no charges or allegations that the Williamson County Election Commission mismanaged or improperly conducted this election.
- After the recount, campaign manager Brian Floyd was asked three times by SEC Member Tess Robbins if he was satisfied with the results. He acknowledged he was, indeed, satisfied with the recount and personally watched the ballots go back into the box. The SEC members took control and possession of all election artifacts. We have established there were no allegations leveled at the Election Commission for any improprieties. What changed from election night to now to warrant accusations that multiple SEC members intentionally miscounted on the recount and or incorrectly handled the artifacts as they claim?

- WCC alleges that they were not allowed to examine election artifacts yet fail to mention they were present during the vote tabulation and recount and could have examined documents at any time. They never asked nor were denied this right.
- The WCC alleges in the contest that I personally, “chased away from the registration table their poll watcher,” who was at the head of the line, using the registration table as his desk, asking voters for their names and checking voters off his private list. Yes, I told him step back 2 feet. Mr. Golden, if you remember, this was in response to a complaint by our Registration Supervisor that Baxter Lee, who was not a poll watcher was, in fact, interfering with check-in.

As a side note: Poll watchers never engage voters in the registration line, they, in fact, work inside the polling station to observe the vote. This is why for transparency I requested each slate provide two volunteers to work inside the polling station. WCC selected as poll watcher Abigail Arpin, who to my knowledge did not show up, and Chris Berger, who was the ballot judge and frequently left the polling station. These were the names recorded with the Election Commission.

Moonhee Bischof, a volunteer with expertise in election integrity was registered with the Election Commission as the official poll watcher for the Convention. Ms. Bischof positioned herself at the backside of the room and observed the ballots being distributed, wristbands being removed, polling area, handling of spoiled ballots, and ballots going into the machines. She remained in the room for the duration of the vote and did not leave the room for one minute. I stood across the room on the opposite wall facing Ms. Bischof for most of the voting; we each could see the entire room. Election Commissioner Duda was responsible for providing a new or clean ballot to voters if the machine rejected the vote. A volunteer never touched or replaced a “spoiled” ballot. Again, there are no allegations of misconduct by the Election Commission,

- The complaint makes numerous claims of bias. Elections, in fact, are by their nature biased affairs. Historically, we have used County Commissioners to assist with elections because they understand the process, lend credibility, and have integrity with voters. Yes, the Commissioners did also, vote. However, they did not wear stickers, pass out push cards, or discuss opinions on candidates. They also did not distribute the ballots. Is WCC suggesting that the mere act of cutting off a wristband created such intense bias that it generated a vote for the opposition or somehow suppressed the vote?

The wristbands, in fact, were not numbered, nor did the colors have a special significance. The Marriott is a public venue, and it was only for admission to the convention and polling station. Attendees were checked off the registration list with proof of ID, so no one could vote twice.

- As a point of further clarification, the Williamson County Conservatives presented themselves to the media, and to the public, as a slate or ticket running as a team. As a slate, they have a PAC, a website, a logo, a Face Book page, and all their mailings were from all the candidates. All communications from the CCC were sent to the top of the ticket, which now is being labeled as an unacceptable means of communication. Why is that?

As a group who is so quick to assert malfeasance, as a group who is so quick to tarnish volunteers and sitting officials, as a group who demands such a zealous adherence to a few of the Bylaws yet refuses many others . . . why did so many of their team spend the majority of their evening in their hospitality room?

Candidate Clifford did not even bother to observe his own recount—although in some of their reports, he mistakenly claims he did. Interestingly, none of the other WCC candidates requested recounts for their races and none of them ask to see the artifacts, etc. I think it is worth noting that Mr. Clifford and Ms. Carol are the only members of this slate who are actually members of the Republican Party of Williamson County. Ali Adair, Drell Floyd, Michelle Sutton, Steven Giorno, Kimberly Calcote and Robert Verell are not members of the WCRP. Why would you want to assume a leadership role in an organization that you are not a member of or volunteer in? Would you want to be President of the Rotary Club, if you weren't an active participant or member?

## **Answer to Complaint**

### **A: Procedural:**

**1. Failure to hold Reorganizational meetings by January 30,2025:** The Williamson County Republican Party obtained a waiver for the Reorganization meeting date.

**2. Time and Place of Reorganization Convention improperly set:** The shift in location was a proactive move in response to the *Clifford Campaign hosting their own registration site*— we had no idea how to plan. The original location had seating for 850 and we had no idea if the WCC was withholding numbers, so we made the decision to proactively to move to a bigger venue. Good thing we did. *Over the weekend prior to the election someone registered 932 names many in alphabetical order* in the State Registration site. Monday morning Ginger had 2783 names and 2326 were sent to us to send confirmation emails. *As a side note there were several people who were asked if they were attending and they said they had not registered, but their name was on the list.*

The Elevate slate contacted me in desperation and begged me not to move the location, they had mailers at the mail house with the incorrect location. Both sides were affected by the result of the actions of one.

The 932 new registrations over the weekend explains why the wristbands are different colors. We simply had to scramble to purchase more and could not find the quantity we needed all in the same color.

**3. Secret Meetings:** Our Meeting was held on February 3rd at 6:30 PM. It is true that a time was not set at the public meeting for the Contest and Credentials Committee. Having experience with chairing a Caucus, I knew I needed to estimate the projected attendance and volunteers required to determine an exact start time. I did state publicly to the committee in the presence of the Clifford Campaign manager, Brian Floyd, that the convention would be after work with registration opening between 4:00-5:00. Given that we had almost 35 volunteers it was not feasible nor warranted, to meet again after the initial meeting.

Please see the attachment for my communication with Mr. Clifford to confirm that the candidates were in fact kept in the loop. Normally candidates have lots of questions about length of speeches, slide shows, campaign materials, what to wear, etc. so I anticipated numerous phone

calls. I received not one phone call from any member of the WCC slate, which frankly I have never had this happen for any event that I have hosted where a politician was scheduled to speak on a public stage.

**4. Non-Delegates Permitted on Convention Floor:** The Marriott is a public venue, and for this reason, we had 5 Williamson County Sheriff's and numerous volunteers monitoring the entrance to the convention. Two reporters and an employee of the Williamson County Republican Party were on the floor with prior approval.

**5. Improper Election Procedures:** Since both slates had two men running for Chair and two women running for First Vice Chair, and given the scope of the election, a waiver was granted by the State to allow for a single vote.

**6. Candidates Denied Right to Appoint Observers:** The Election Commission asked for 2 observers and 2 ballot Judges to volunteer in the polling station. To be gracious and in the spirit of transparency, I asked each campaign to name volunteers for these positions.

This is from an email sent to Mr. Clifford on February 17th: Would your campaign like to select a volunteer to serve as Judge of spoiled ballots and to monitor voting and tabulation results? We also would like to welcome you, as the candidates, to watch election tabulation and results. The observer is in essence the campaigns "poll watcher." Mr. Clifford appointed Chris Berger who was assigned to judge ballots, but he frequently left the polling area during voting. Their other volunteer, Abigail Arpin, did not show up, nor did he replace her to my knowledge.

After the final vote was cast, *runners were sent to notify the campaigns* that the tabulation would commence. Mr. Clifford arrived with his two campaign managers, Brian Floyd and Aaron Gulbransen. The other candidates on his slate did not show up to observe. However, they were never denied this right.

I assume this was in part the lack of familiarity with the Republican Bylaws by Clifford's slate since *6 out of 8 are not members of the Williamson County Republican Party.*

Two years ago, Mister Clifford was 0/4 when he approached Cyndi Miller to provide a waiver for him so he could run for County Commission, a seat he won because of Ms. Miller's assistance. At the convention, Mr. Clifford seemed disengaged and, as an example, he did not remain in the room for the recount but asked his campaign manager to serve as witness.

## **B. Security and Integrity Violations:**

**1. Early Opening of the Registration:** Our staff were in place and as lines were forming, we allowed elderly and disabled attendees to register early and provided special seating. We opened registration at 4:15 instead of 4:30. However, given the size of the projected crowd, I deemed this was warranted. There were only a handful of voters during this time frame, and most were from the Conservative Slate, because they had been instructed to register early and head to the hospitality suite. The WCC supporters arrived with stickers and were the only ones who asked to register early.

**2. Open Access to Voting/Count Room:** There were approximately 25 volunteers and staff working in the polling station with 40 polling stations in a relatively small room, so unless you

were aware of who - "should be" in the room I think it would be impossible for a casual observer to say who - "shouldn't be" in the room. We were moving volunteers around to assist as needed and I did not observe anyone in the room who should not have been there. We had our Poll Watcher, Ms. Bischof in place if anyone should have entered the room who should not have been there, she would have asked them to leave. If the WCC Slate had been working with a Poll Watchers as requested or if Chris Berger, the ballot judge had stayed in the room they would have been able to question anything that concerned them the night of the election.

- The teams removing wristbands and passing out ballots and processed 1550 voters in an hour and a half. They were moving like greased lightning, and it may have been messy but it was effective.

Several voters did in fact attempt to take an extra ballot, the volunteers called for Jonathan Duda, Chairman of the Election Commission as they were trained to do who corrected the situation.

The exit door was secure and was always monitored by the Election Staff and or a volunteer. The appointed ballot judge for the Clifford campaign, Chris Berger, was the only person who violated the rule of not entering this door.

If the WCC observed irregularities in voting, it should have been brought to my attention, and we could have cleared it up on the spot. At no time during the voting did anyone voice questions or concerns. The WCC complaint makes no allegations of misconduct on how the actual election was conducted by the Election Commission.

**3. Questionable "Spoiled" Ballots:** The number of spoiled ballots were the result of people not filling in the bubbles correctly, making smiley faces or making check marks by the names. The number of spoiled ballots may have also been in direct proportion to the amount of time voters spent enjoying libations in the hospitality room that the WCC provided. One elected official arrived with a drink in each hand. The hospitality room opened at 4:00, voting was several hours later. Again, I had zero complaints the night of the election in regards to spoiled ballots.

**4. Chain of Custody Breakdown:** Wristbands did not have serial numbers; the color had no significance, and they were only used to denote who was eligible to enter the convention and to vote. Someone downloaded a massive number of voters into the State Registration site over the weekend prior to the convention, and we had to scramble to get more wristbands on Monday which ended up being different colors than the original purchase.

The Marriott is a public place, so we needed a way to denote qualified participants. The Election Commission concurred that wristbands should not be used for an audit trail.

The wristbands were placed low on voters' arms and very tight so they could not remove them, which may have allowed someone to vote twice. Voters who received a wristband were recorded and could not get a second band. The night of the election there were no questions about the wristbands, registration logs, or anything else. There was complete transparency, the candidate only needed to ask, there were no secrets. I did find it odd that the WCC did not have one question for me the night of the election.

Mr. Clifford sent for two representatives on his behalf, Brian Floyd and Aron Gulbranson, to request a recount. Representatives from both campaigns as well as Contest and Credentials members were present. Jonathan Duda, Election Commissioner, discussed the chain of custody

and that ***both campaigns watched as he counted and sealed the spoiled ballots*** as well as other documents related to the election. There were no “chain of custody breakdowns.”

During the discussion about care and handling of the unused ballots, Chad Grey suggested that Moonhee Bischoff dispose of them in a dumpster, or she could burn them. This was turned into a vulgar attempt to incite anger via a Facebook post, falsely suggesting Ms. Bischoff advocated burning the spoiled ballots. To the contrary, she was selected for her role in the convention based on her sterling reputation and known expertise in election integrity. This was slanderous. It was done with malice and with the clear intention of damaging her reputation. *Is there any action the State can take to repair this damage? If not, I worry over our ability to obtain quality volunteers in the future.*

**5. Bona Fide Republican Denied Right to Vote:** The registration table simply looked up voter names on the list Ginger provided and put wrist bands on those whose names were on that list. They never made a single decision on who was a qualified participant, nor did they turn one person away. Applicants not on the qualified list were sent to the non-registered room, and if they were deemed not qualified, it was a decision made under the supervision of the SEC members and State Party employees.

**6. Campaigning and Electioneering in Voting Areas:** I think we need to define, “Voting area.” Is the voting area, in the lobby, the convention floor or is it the line with literally hundreds of people waiting to vote? Neither campaign was allowed to be in the polling station or directly outside the entrance. This simply did not happen. Nor did campaign workers wear stickers or pass out push cards. My volunteers inside the polling station spent the evening removing push cards from both campaigns that previous voters left behind. Neither campaign placed push cards in the polling stations. Our Poll Watcher would not have allowed that to occur.

## **C. Conflict of Interest**

**1. Biased Election Officials:** I think we can safely say that every Bonafide Republican in Williamson County was biased on election night: after at least 6 flyers in the mail and in some cases more, constant text messages, articles in local papers, interviews on 99.7, and a barrage of social media post, everyone had an opinion. Anyone who volunteered to work at the convention or turned out to vote had a bias or they would have stayed home.

I would argue that our Election Commissioner Jonathon Duda also has a bias, he requested 3000 ballots when only 1200 people had registered as of Friday prior to the election on Tuesday. Did Mr. Duda have prior knowledge that almost 1,000 names in some cases in alphabetical order would be entered into the State registration site over the weekend? The election was on Tuesday.

Mr. Duda then provided a statement of concern to support the WCC supporting the assertion that the Commissioners were biased, which as Election Commissioner, he should never have publicly made claims about an elected official whose election he will oversee in the future. This statement was a de facto endorsement of the WCC Slate and his demonstrated bias.

However, do I think this de facto endorsement impeded Mr. Duda’s ability to conduct a secure and fair election? No. It just tells us he had bias like everyone else who cast a vote, including the Commissioners he condemned. They are all politicians and understand how elections work, which is why they were asked to volunteer in the first place. It is interesting the WCC complaint

does not challenge how the election was conducted or its integrity but rather choose an emotional rather than fact-based appeal.

**2. SEC Member Bias:** I am not going to dignify this with a response. SEC members from at least 5 Counties traveled at their own expense, paid for hotel rooms and meals, and volunteered their time to help with the largest election in the history of the State. I think a thank you note would have the appropriate response.

**3. Incumbent Advantage:** Candidates not receiving emails to confirm their candidacy in a timely manner had no impact on the outcome of the election. The WCC presented themselves to the media and public as a slate or ticket running together as a team. As a slate they have a PAC, a website, a logo, a Face Book page and all mailings were from all candidates. All communications from the CCC were sent to the top of the ticket, which now is being labeled unacceptable.

Please see my communications with Mr. Clifford in the attachment above. I would like to again point out that not one member of this slate contacted me with questions or concerns. This is the first time I have ever held an event where candidates or an elected official was going to speak in a public venue that did not reach out with questions. Normally you get frantic phone calls about the length of the speeches, who is doing the introduction, how is the room set up, is there a podium, is there a table for campaign materials or even what to wear – I had not one question. I normally assign someone to greet candidates and show them to their seats or even allow a sound check. Mr. Clifford somehow turned this into an attempt to intimidate his campaign. Please review the correspondence attached above.

**4. Denial of Poll Watchers:** Candidates right to appoint observers and poll watchers are both addressed in 6A.

**5. Voter Intimidation:** I was not made aware of voter intimidation tactics on the evening of the Convention, or I would have intervened. I did get complaints about Baxter Lee interfering at the reception desk asking voters their names and either writing them down or checking to see if they were on “his” list. There were 5 very large Williamson County Sheriffs on site and if anyone felt unsafe, they could have approached an officer for help. I did not, in fact, receive one complaint that evening or afterwards.

In closing, I need to repeat that all these questions, suspicions, accusations, and fabrications by the Clifford campaign could have been addressed at the time or immediately following the convention. Ironically, many of the existing problems were in fact the problems they themselves created. Their secret QR code made it necessary to change the venue. They complained.

Dumping the secret list of names at the last minute caused a host of registration issues. They complained. People came in from their hospitality room, liquored up, threatening participants, shouting, and trying to kick open doors. They cast aspersions about all the chaos. They overheard a remark about disposing of blank ballots, and instead of asking or clarifying, they craft a lie and disseminate it.

Finally adding insult to injury, they claim that the State has acknowledged the validity of their claims, so what further evidence of their insincerity do you need? I ask that you not only dismiss this complaint, but that you issue a reprimand to the WCC Campaign.

Should you have any additional questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you again, for your consideration and time.

Best regards,

Debbie Deaver, Chairman Contest and Credentials Committee