

Commissioners

From: FarawayMT@aol.com
Sent: Sunday, January 19, 2014 1:18 PM
To: Commissioners
Subject: VALERIE STAMEY

Dear Commissioners:

I am a 70 year old long time resident of Ravalli County. My wife and I pay thousands of dollars annually in property taxes. We are not wealthy people. I write today out of frustration over the Stamey affair.

It is disheartening to see you, our Commissioners, clearly place politics above the public interest in the way you have chosen to govern. The appointment of Valerie Stamey is just the latest example of that. You can declare that she was selected because she was the most qualified, but no one believes that. If you believe it, you are deluding yourselves. This is a person who is a fairly recent transplant from South Carolina to Montana whose background is primarily in school food service operations. She has had five or six jobs in the six years since she arrived in Montana, including employment by a local motel and a plumbing supply company. Another applicant had many years of experience in county treasurer's offices in Montana, including Ravalli County. However, for this Commission Stamey had the only qualification that really mattered, namely her political affiliations. The Ravalli Republic reports today that Stamey served as a precinct captain for the Ravalli County Republican Central Committee and that "many of her recommendation letters came from committee members." That was enough for a majority of this Commission to set aside the crucial imperative that the person responsible for handling tax receipts and the complex operations of the Treasurer's Office be experienced and capable of doing so.

But that is not the worst of it. You chose to entrust millions of dollars of our money with a person who appears to be more than incompetent—she has much in her background to raise grave doubts about her personal financial responsibility and even her honesty. To begin with this is a person who uses three different names in the conduct of her life and business. That alone raises red flags. She also has a default judgment against her out of South Carolina for having cashed a check twice. I have reviewed the civil complaint upon which the judgment for some \$18,000 was entered. To say it is disturbing would be an understatement. The allegations constitute fraud and theft, and she still hasn't paid the judgment. Indeed, given the timing set forth in the complaint, there is every reason to suspect that she re-located to Montana in an effort to avoid financial, and perhaps even criminal difficulties. In that connection, she could have potentially faced federal mail and wire fraud charges under 18 U.S.C. §1341 and 1343 for her use of the telephone and mail to accomplish a fraud.

Additionally, I have read the complaint that Stamey filed against her former employer, the Missoula County Public School District, alleging wrongful termination based on allegations that her "independent business operation" was complicit in false invoicing and repeat payments by the MPSD to a supplier. Stamey's complaint, sworn to under oath, asserts that her termination was "pursuant to a discharge letter that contained false

statements." That complaint was filed nearly a year ago, but, according to the public response of the MCPS this week, was never served, and is false. The MCPS has advised that she was not even fired, but was re-assigned and submitted her resignation based on "personal and professional reasons," directly quoting from her letter of resignation. Stamey's grievance for wrongful termination was unsuccessful. This matter bears further investigation as well in that it pertains to additional allegations of financial fraud as well as possible lying under oath.

There are presently also reports of a failure to pay a local vet that has gone to collection, and reports that she hadn't registered her car for three years and only paid past-due property taxes just prior to applying for the Treasurer's position. We have learned that in an extraordinarily irresponsible and foolish move, she purportedly brought personal funds into the Treasurer's office to use in its operation, thus shortly after taking office she was in effect already commingling personal and County money. She later had someone watch her count the personal money as she took it away. Notably, there appears to be no witness to her bringing money into the office, only the witness she requested when removing it from the office. Moreover, cash and miscellaneous checks for thousands of dollars were found in her unlocked desk rather than the office safe. Has this been thoroughly investigated to insure that in fact she had brought into the office the money that she took out? All of these matters require further investigation.

This is a recipe for disaster, a disaster brought about by this Commission's playing politics with the hard earned money of citizens of Ravalli County. It is difficult to believe that, prior to this incident, no background check other than criminal was done on someone applying for a position in which they are entrusted with very large sums of County funds. Even if such background checks were not done, weren't applicants at least required to respond to elementary questions such as whether there are any outstanding civil judgments against them? Basic common sense dictates that a person with personal financial problems, no matter what the reasons, is not a suitable candidate for a position such as County Treasurer.

Most of us in Ravalli County are concerned mainly about the nuts and bolts of government such as infrastructure, public health and safety, and efficient operation of the various components of our county government. This Commission seems to care mostly about party politics, ideology, and affairs over which they do not now and are never likely to have any jurisdiction or control. That is clear. And the result is equally clear. I can only hope that in future elections, independent candidates can be found, people who care about the practical concerns of life in our Valley, not pure politics, cronyism, and patronage. Someone is going to have to come in and clean up your mess.

Norman James
Corvallis