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Editorial Opinion, Published Whenever Necessary

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Kopelman Makes Ass of Self, Embarrasses County

D.A., Undersheriff Implicated in Failed Plot to Nail Culverwell

Pioche--Acting County Commissioner David "Lame Duck" Kopelman seems to be doing everything in his power to disrupt County government since being trounced at the primaries last month. In the Oct. 5 commissioner's meeting, he attacked Commissioner Eve Culverwell--and just about everyone else in the room--for alleged conflict of interest. He then sabotaged the Oct. 20 meeting by not deigning to show up at all, insisting he was "on county business" even though he was sighted in Pioche throughout the day.

The Independent asks: How did we get stuck with this turkey, and how soon can we get rid of him?

Kopelman was appointed to the County Commission by Governor Miller to fill the seat left vacant by [Floyd Lamb's recall](#). Kopelman immediately began to grate on nerves and make enemies at commission meetings by raising objections and attaching conditions to almost every mundane piece of county business. The voters evidently saw the light when they rejected him in the primary, and that's when Kopelman really started getting nasty.

The Oct. 5 meeting was the ultimate circus. At a cost to the county of hundreds of dollars, Kopelman arranged to have a court stenographer present to transcribe, in exact detail, the grand expose he expected to take place. What was recorded, instead, is more than enough material to hang Kopelman himself--and maybe a couple of other county officials with him.

COMMISSIONER KOPELMAN: "One thing I want is an accurate record. I will say something else before we start. One thing the public is entitled to is everyone act honestly; the truth. I would ask everyone here to tell the truth. I think that's very important for this county. That goes beyond all individuals. All I'm asking; nothing more. Thank you. I'd like to take a break to go to the bathroom."

Kopelman is, truthfully, an ass. But the Oct. 5 fiasco reflects on the ethics and intelligence of more than one man. Kopelman had helpers in his crusade against Culverwell, and his bungled inquisition may have revealed some of the dry rot and malicious undercurrents lying just below the surface in certain county offices.

The Botched Plot

While Kopelman's rantings at the Oct. 5 meeting covered a wide range of subject matter, the focus of attack was Commissioner Eve "Mad as Hell" Culverwell. Kopelman accused her of conflict of interest for inquiring about the ethics of inquiring about a job funded by the nuclear waste project.

CULVERWELL: "I had heard about this job possibly coming up. And I addressed the issue with Tom and said: Is that a conflict of interest, and if it is, how do I find out? And he said he would look into it."

In the tapes and transcripts of the Oct. 5 meeting, District Attorney Tom Dill confirmed Culverwell's claim, that she hadn't sought the job, only his advice about possible conflict of interest if she did. Inquiring about a conflict of interest is not a conflict of interest; it is the opposite. It means Culverwell is sensitive to ethical concerns and is seeking professional advice. How can a public official know whether or not an act is a conflict of interest unless they inquire of

counsel?

Now, the plot thickens. If Dill was the only person in county government who Culverwell confided this to, how did Kopelman find out? Obviously, Dill breached the confidence, as confirmed profusely by Kopelman....

KOPELMAN: "I have been told by the District Attorney that you were looking for a job in regard to project paid for by nuclear waste money."

KOPELMAN: "The District Attorney informed me that you had discussions with him, and I'm obligated to discuss this according to the Attorney General in open public."

KOPELMAN: "In my opinion, I think based on what I have been told by the District Attorney, he's my associate. He's my source. There's a glaring conflict with you [Culverwell] particularly, and based on what the District Attorney told me last night, I see one frankly with Mr. Wright."

KOPELMAN: "As I understand it, these are statements made to me by the District Attorney which are hearsay. In one case, there are conversations that you had with the District Attorney personally that he's certainly credible and the other case are conversations he has had with someone else, and conversations Mr. Wright had with the District Attorney. And based on that, I don't see how you can chair this meeting or take part on anything with regard to nuclear waste."

Okay, let's review the situation. A county official has preliminary interest in applying for a job but is concerned that it might present a conflict of interest, so she approaches, in confidence, the District Attorney, her official counsel, to ask his legal advice. The District Attorney then reports this conversation to another county official, already known as a loose cannon, who makes the conversation public and cites it as proof that the first county official already has a conflict of interest.

Whose ethics are suspect now?

Kopelman's quotes also suggest that the D.A. also had private discussions with Commissioner Wright, topic unknown, and these were also conveyed to Kopelman. Doesn't District Attorney Tom "Must Have Failed The Ethics Course in Law School" Dill ever shut up?

But wait, there's more.

Sheriff's Dept.'s "Special Project"

KOPELMAN: "He told me--District Attorney told me--first of all, he didn't tell me. It was first brought to my attention by an undersheriff who said he had discussions with the District Attorney. Before I confronted him on it, let me tell what he told me. [Culverwell] made inquiries about a job possibly funded [by] nuclear waste funds."

Which undersheriff could Kopelman be referring to? The undersheriff of Nye County? The undersheriff of Clark County? Or could it be our own Lincoln County undersheriff Gary "Devil's Little Helper" Davis? That might explain why Undersheriff Davis has been seen so often at Kopelman's house in Alamo. Sources say that, for a while, Davis was going there almost daily, staying for twenty minutes to two hours at a time, in the Sheriff's vehicle and in uniform, apparently on county time.

What was happening during these pow-wows? Were they just having a casual afternoon tea, or were they planning the downfall of Commissioner Culverwell? The scenario sounds familiar. Wasn't this the same role Davis played in getting rid of Floyd? Flitting around like a busy bee, distributing information, making alliances, collecting signatures to bring down the commissioner that Dahl didn't like. Now, it looks like they were aiming for Culverwell, who, like Floyd, wasn't taking any B.S. from the Sheriff's Dept.

Let's summarize what has happened, according to the tapes and transcript: Culverwell confides in Dill to inquire about ethics. Dill breaks that confidence to report the conversation to Davis. Davis takes the info to Kopelman. Kopelman approaches Dill for his own briefing, and Dill reports the Culverwell conversation directly to him. Kopelman, dimwit

that he is, attempts an inquiry with the information but blunders badly, providing plenty of evidence against Dill and Davis.

Looks like Lincoln County has its own little Watergate brewing.

Unresolved Issues

The big question is now, How much did the Sheriff know? Was he in collusion with Davis, fully knowledgeable of his actions, or was he merely grossly negligent in not keeping track of his deputies? Is the Sheriff going to conduct an investigation of Davis's actions? Or is he going to stonewall and pretend that nothing ever happened. Since the coup failed, the co-conspirators are running away from Kopelman like rats from a sinking ship. "Never heard of him," the Sheriff's Dept. is going to say, but they can't get rid of Kopelman's transcript. That's going to hang around for a long, long time.

Other questions that need to be addressed in the ever widening Kopelman scandal...

Did Davis conduct his Kopelman pow-wow sessions on county time? If so, will he be censured by the Sheriff? Will he be required to reimburse the county for time spent on these political errands?

What's going to happen to the D.A.? How can he do his job effectively now that no county official will ever trust him again?

Who approved the court stenographer, and whose department is going to pay for it?

Why did Governor Miller choose Kopelman contrary to the recommendation of the Lincoln County Democratic Party? Was he repaying some political debt, or merely trying to humiliate us?

Is Governor Miller going to let Mr. K. torture us until January or relieve him immediately after the elections?

Why did Kopelman want the Employee's Association involved in the Oct. 5 meeting? What's cookin' there?

Where was Kopelman during the Oct. 5 "missing hour" when he was in the courthouse but did not appear at the Commissioner's meeting? Rumors suggest he was meeting with still other county officials in preparation for the coup.

...In the meantime, Culverwell's a-bitch'n. Talks about "getting her ducks in a row." That must be secret code for, "Y'ain't heard the end of this one, fellas."

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