



Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics & Public Trust **CASE**

Investigative Report

CLOSED

Investigator: Robert Steinback

Date: 12/14/15

Case PI15-026	Case Name: Sharie Blanton	<u>Date Open:</u>	<u>Date Closed:</u>
Complainant(s): Anonymous	Subject(s): Sharie Blanton	July 20, 2015	

Allegation(s):

Complainant alleges that subject Sharie A. Blanton (Blanton), Special Projects Coordinator for (former) Miami City Commissioner Marc Sarnoff (Marc Sarnoff), improperly engaged in campaign activity on behalf of (former) Miami City Commission candidate Teresa Sarnoff (Sarnoff -- Marc Sarnoff's wife) while performing city duties.

Relevant Ordinances:

Complainant alleges a violation of Sec. 2-11.1 (g) of the Miami-Dade County Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics ordinance: *No person [covered by this ordinance] shall use or attempt to use his or her official position to secure special privileges or exemptions for himself or herself or others except as may be specifically permitted by other ordinances and resolutions...."*



Investigation:

Interviews

Christopher Hudson (Hudson), deacon of the St. Matthews Community Church and Secretary of the Coconut Grove Ministerial Alliance (Grove Alliance), in mid-August.

Hudson said he chaired the July 11, 2015, regular Saturday meeting of the Grove Alliance. He said that the meeting agendas typically feature the same items 1 through 5, while those 6 and beyond vary. [The July 11 agenda lists under Item 3 – City of Miami Net Office, (a) “Commissioner [Marc] Sarnoff Office.” Under item 6 – Community Issues and Concerns, is (b) “Teresa Sarnoff.”]

Hudson said Marc Sarnoff’s office always has a representative at the meeting. Lately, Sharrie Blanton has been that representative.

This particular week – July 11, 2018 – Hudson said Blanton stated that she had nothing to report. This was despite Hudson noting that a public pool renovation was underway that might have been worthy of mention.

When the floor was opened for questions, Hudson recalled that there were a few, but none were of a political nature, nor were any about Sarnoff or Marc Sarnoff specifically.

Hudson said that he recalled that Blanton and Sarnoff were sitting at the same table but not next to each other. Blanton was “very attentive to every word, but was not saying anything,” Hudson recalled.

Sarnoff spoke for only about 3 to 5 minutes, Hudson recalled. She did not discuss policy or overtly political issues, he said. He said Sarnoff just spoke of her family, why she wanted to be the next commissioner. Hudson said Teresa Sarnoff did not mention her husband at all. She spoke of how she loved the Grove, and didn’t speak of any specific policy issues.

Hudson said Blanton never got up. She didn’t even stand up when she said, “I have nothing new to report.”

Among the other people who attended the meeting were Commission candidates Javier Gonzalez, William Armbrister and Seth Sklarney. However, Hudson advised those three individuals were regular attendees of the meeting even before they became declared candidates.

Hudson said he did not notice any material distributed to all of the attendees, which would have had to have been approved in advance.

Sharie A. Blanton, by telephone, December 1, 2015.

Blanton said she was Commissioner Marc Sarnoff's representative every month at the Grove Alliance's meeting. She said she vaguely remembers the specific meeting, but states categorically that she was not there to work on Theresa Sarnoff's campaign.

Blanton recalled that a different Miami City Commission candidate was featured at a series of Grove Alliance meetings.

Blanton said she didn't recall if she had handouts at that meeting, but said that if she had, she would have distributed them to everyone. She stated, "I didn't have any special information for her [Sarnoff] that wasn't available to all of the meeting attendees."

Blanton said that since the election, she has worked as the Upper Eastside Neighborhood Enhancement Team (NET) coordinator.

Document/Audio/Video Review:

Copy of the Coconut Grove Ministerial Alliance/Coconut Grove Drug Free Community Coalition meeting agenda for July 11, 2015.

Analysis/Conclusion

The vagueness of the complaint – that Blanton handed materials to Theresa Sarnoff that were not made available to other candidates in the room – makes investigation of this matter problematic at best.

The coordinator of the event, Deacon Christopher Hudson, had no recollection of any noticeable contact between Blanton and Sarnoff. Blanton was on the regular agenda as was custom, to report on any noteworthy activities of Commissioner Marc Sarnoff's office. Sarnoff was on the agenda for that particular week, part of a series of opportunities to address the meeting afforded to all Commission candidates.

Hudson recalls that Blanton did not offer any remarks on behalf of the Commissioner's office and may have handled only a few benign questions. He recalled Theresa Sarnoff's remarks as primarily personal in nature, including only a general introduction and solicitation for support.

It should be noted that Theresa Sarnoff subsequently forced a runoff with fellow candidate Ken Russell, but withdrew her candidacy before Election Day, conceding the seat to Russell.

This investigation did not uncover any evidence to substantiate an allegation of any wrongdoing by Blanton.

After discussion with the COE Advocate, it is recommended that this matter be closed with no further action.

(Signature)

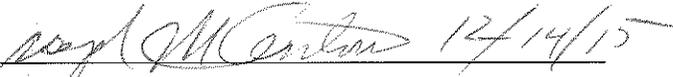


Robert Steinback, COE Investigator

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael Murawski", written over a horizontal line.

Michael Murawski, Advocate

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joseph Centorino", followed by the date "12/14/15", written over a horizontal line.

Joseph Centorino, Executive Director