



**BEFORE THE STATE COMMISSION
ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT**

CJC Nos. 20-0729, 20-0730, 20-0731 & 20-0739

PUBLIC WARNING

**HONORABLE LONNIE COX
56TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT
GALVESTON, GALVESTON COUNTY, TEXAS**

During its meeting on October 5-7, 2020, the State Commission on Judicial Conduct concluded a review of the allegations against the Honorable Lonnie Cox, 56th Judicial District Court, Galveston, Galveston County, Texas. Judge Cox was advised by letter of the Commission's concerns and provided a written response.

BACKGROUND

On January 21, 2020, Judge Cox attended a fundraising event hosted by Galveston County Tax Assessor-Collector Cheryl E. Johnson in support of her campaign for reelection. Judge Cox introduced Ms. Johnson to those in attendance, stating in part:

She's the best damn tax assessor collector that we have in this country. And so you'd be making a huge mistake -- you'd be making a huge mistake -- if you even give any attention to anybody else that runs for that office. So I encourage you, don't waste your vote. Don't vote for someone who will not be watching your back. That's one thing I like about Cheryl, she watches my back -- she's doing it right now -- she watches my back, I try to watch her back, that's what we do and that's what makes government work well. Now, we need you to watch our backs, we need you to vote for Cheryl Johnson.

A member of Ms. Johnson's campaign staff recorded Judge Cox's remarks on her cell phone and streamed it live on Facebook. The video was taken down the next day at Judge Cox's request.

In his responses to the Commission, Judge Cox stated he did not authorize the video recording of his remarks or the posting of same to social media. Judge Cox indicated that as soon as he became aware the video existed, he immediately asked Ms. Johnson's campaign staff to remove it from Facebook.

After considering the evidence before it, the Commission enters the following Findings and Conclusion:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. At all times relevant hereto, the Honorable Lonnie Cox was judge of the 56th Judicial District Court, Galveston, Galveston County, Texas.
2. On January 21, 2020, Judge Cox introduced Galveston County Tax Assessor-Collector Cheryl E. Johnson at a fundraising event in support of her campaign for reelection.
3. During his introduction, Judge Cox expressed his support for Ms. Johnson's candidacy and exhorted those in attendance to vote for her.
4. A video recording of Judge Cox's remarks was streamed live on Facebook by a member of Ms. Johnson's campaign staff.

RELEVANT STANDARDS

1. Canon 2B of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct provides that a judge shall not lend the prestige of judicial office to advance the private interests of the judge or others.
2. Canon 5(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct provides that a judge shall not authorize the public use of his or her name endorsing another candidate for public office; and, while the Comment to Canon 5 indicates joint campaign activity conducted by two or more *judicial* candidates is not prohibited, no such proviso applies to a judge's activity related to a *non-judicial* candidate.

CONCLUSION

Based on the record before it and the factual findings recited above, the Texas State Commission on Judicial Conduct has determined that the Honorable Lonnie Cox, judge of the 56th Judicial District Court in Galveston, Galveston County, Texas, should be publicly warned for endorsing Ms. Johnson in her campaign for reelection and lending the prestige of his judicial office to advance Ms. Johnson's private interests in this regard, in violation of Canons 2B and 5(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.

The Commission has taken this action pursuant to the authority conferred it in Article V, §1-a of the Texas Constitution in a continuing effort to protect the public and promote public confidence in the judicial system.

Issued this the 4th day of December, 2020.



David Hall
Chairman, State Commission on Judicial Conduct