

March 27, 2023

This correspondence is to officially notify you of my resignation.

I have worked alongside many commissioners and there has always been mutual respect. There is zero respect or even common courtesy from commissioners to county election employees or myself. My job has never been political, both on the Clerk & Recorder side and especially elections. Now, politics is being shoved down my throat and I refuse to comply with someone else's world view.

I have for many years afforded all county commissioners the courtesy and professionalism to provide them documents well ahead of meetings that I am presenting for their review; draft minutes, resolutions, contracts, etc. My tactic is not to blindside them.

On November 9, 2022 (the day after the General Election), Commissioner Letcher read from a document that I did not have and held a meeting about elections expanding the post-election audit without notifying me or election staff. This meeting was not even on the commissioner calendar, nor was election staff present because they were not provided the courtesy of even knowing elections would be discussed. Of course, reporters were calling election staff immediately wanting comment (after working 20 hours the day before). Election staff had no idea what the reporters were referring to. Commissioner Letcher provided the document to us after the meeting. Twice, during that meeting I questioned having an election discussion without election staff present. The commissioners did not respect or respond to this simple request for employee courtesy. Commissioner Letcher's response to this in an email dated November 10 was "The letter I read yesterday was pressed upon my heart at 5:30 am as I was lying in bed restlessly asking the Lord for advice".

Again, on March 1, 2023 Commissioner Letcher had paperwork that he did not take to the Election Administrator Paula Buff ahead of time for discussion or review, nor did he provide it to me ahead of time for review, claiming accusations in front of reporters and the public. Paula Buff was hired January of 2021 and not once, ever, has Commissioner Letcher sat down with her directly and asked any questions. There simply is no justifying his actions. Paula and Amanda have worked tirelessly and diligently for the county and all electors in Lincoln County and have run safe and secure elections. They are inundated with FOIA requests and information gatherers, not to be helpful, but in my opinion, to grasp at straws...what can we find to throw daggers, while they do all the work. The hostility shown to Paula and Amanda, of course, is all under the guise of "election integrity".

Misinformation is the virus. In today's society, there is no getting ahead of it. When you factually hold up a green piece of grass, firstly, the finger pointers don't want to see it, and secondly, they only see black. You cannot work with that. Commissioners know very little to nothing about elections. I have been attending election training through the Secretary of States Office for approximately 20 years. Never once has a commissioner been in attendance, ever. Title 13 MCA governs elections, not commissioners. The Secretary of State is the Montana Chief Election Officer and they provide the training and guidance to all EA's across the state.

Election staff are fearful of attending commissioner meetings, and rightfully so; they can no longer do their jobs. There is zero support from the commissioners. Both Paula Buff and Amanda Eckart are leaving their positions under severe distress and anxiety. I cannot convey the absolute loss this is to the county and the electors of Lincoln County. Recently, at a Montana Association of Counties Conference

with Commissioners across the state in attendance, Secretary of State Christi Jacobsen acknowledged Lincoln County Election staff (as well as 4 or 5 other counties) for their assistance during 2022 elections running tandem testing to help the SOS with their new ElectMT database. Also, Paula and Amanda were specifically asked by the SOS to be on a committee to work in an advisory capacity to the SOS as well as helping all Election Administrators across the state. It's an honor all of Lincoln County can be proud of.

It is undeniable this behavior by county commissioners is a broader problem within the county and is affecting multiple departments and their employees. Simply, it is a toxic environment, and it is sad to see the employee morale at such a low point.

Given the current leadership in Lincoln County, the lack of respect I have experienced, I cannot in good conscience continue to serve in my elected capacity of Clerk & Recorder. The Commissioners can hire their own election staff and appoint their own Clerk & Recorder.

Sincerely,

Robin Benson