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IN RE:

MICHELE MILLER,
 Plaintiff,

v.
CITY of MEXICO BEACH,
FLORIDA, CITY COUNCIL,

 Defendant.

_____ /

CONFIDENTIAL SWORN STATEMENT

SWORN STATEMENT OF: MICHELLE LUCAS

DATE: SEPTEMBER 18, 2023

LOCATION: VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
 (ZOOM)

TRANSCRIBED BY: YVONNE LaFLAMME, RPR, FPR

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APPEARANCES:

For the Plaintiff:

JOHN BAILEY, INVESTIGATOR
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(850) 383-4800

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I N D E X P A G E

DESCRIPTION

PAGE NO.

MICHELLE LUCAS

Questions by MR. BAILEY

4

NO EXHIBITS MARKED

P R O C E E D I N G S

1
2 MR. BAILEY: Okay. Do you have your driver's
3 license?

4 MS. LUCAS: I do, but actually, I'm on the
5 phone with you and my driver's license is in my
6 phone. But I know the number.

7 MR. BAILEY: Can you -- do you have a one with
8 you?

9 MS. LUCAS: Yeah. Hold on.

10 MR. BAILEY: You can just leave me there and
11 grab your ID, and I'll just get the stuff off the
12 phone.

13 MS. LUCAS: I've got it.

14 MR. BAILEY: All right. Can you show it to me
15 real quick? Michelle L. Lucas. And that is a,
16 what, ID? Back that up real quick?

17 MS. LUCAS: I'm sorry?

18 MR. BAILEY: What state is that in?

19 MS. LUCAS: Kentucky.

20 MR. BAILEY: Kentucky. Okay.

21 So my position at -- I work for Marie Mattox
22 as an investigator. I am not an attorney. I just
23 get cases and I take sworn statements if
24 individuals are willing to do that. You can leave
25 at any time. If there's a question you don't want

1 to answer, you can shut it down and leave at that
2 time. I have to advise you of that.

3 Can you raise your right hand for me? Do you
4 swear or affirm the testimony you're about to give
5 is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the
6 truth?

7 MS. LUCAS: I do.

8 MR. BAILEY: All right. When did you start
9 working for the City of Mexico Beach?

10 MS. LUCAS: Hold on. Let me grab my calendar.
11 I can tell you.

12 MR. BAILEY: Yes, ma'am.

13 MS. LUCAS: I'm wanting to say it was June
14 the 28th. It would be June 27th.

15 MR. BAILEY: June the 27th?

16 MS. LUCAS: Yep.

17 MR. BAILEY: That's good, right off of memory.

18 MS. LUCAS: Wait. I'm sorry. It was the
19 20th.

20 MR. BAILEY: June 20th?

21 MS. LUCAS: Yes.

22 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And what is your
23 background? What type of education do you have?

24 MS. LUCAS: I have a bachelor's in business
25 management with a minor in human resources and

1 accounting.

2 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And what were you told
3 that this job entailed?

4 MS. LUCAS: I was told that this job entailed
5 pretty much the normal duties of a finance
6 director, which meant I would approve checks, that
7 I would be responsible for all of the taxes and all
8 of the legal documents that had to be prepared, and
9 then, of course, working with the auditors.

10 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And what -- I guess you
11 ran into some problems pretty quickly when you were
12 there with trying to get access to the software?

13 MS. LUCAS: Yes. It took me two weeks to get
14 my computer. Then when I did, I had no help
15 getting into the software. And then, finally,
16 Debbie gave me access to the software, but it was
17 only partial because there was a lot of things that
18 were grayed out that I could not look at.

19 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And did they give you the
20 access for you to carry out your job duties?

21 MS. LUCAS: The access was not open enough for
22 me to do my entire job.

23 MR. BAILEY: So, for instance, if you had to
24 look at an invoice for a check, did you have access
25 for it?

1 MS. LUCAS: I could do everything in '21 and
2 '20, but beyond that -- maybe '19 -- beyond that, I
3 could not view anything.

4 MR. BAILEY: Okay. How many years behind is
5 the audit?

6 MS. LUCAS: They are behind '22 and '23 as of
7 October 1st. That's when '23 should be prepared to
8 start but they can't do it until they get '22 done.

9 MR. BAILEY: Okay. Do you remember what you
10 didn't have access to that was slowing your
11 abilities?

12 MS. LUCAS: I had no access to payroll so some
13 of those reports would ask, what is, you know, the
14 monthly -- especially if you're doing FICA or
15 filing those documents. You have to be able to
16 look at those, and I had no access to any of the
17 payroll documentation.

18 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

19 MS. LUCAS: So I would have to request things
20 from Mary Harmon, which is the -- I don't know what
21 her job title is, but she's the clerk that writes
22 all of the checks and things like that.

23 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And I guess you had had a
24 conversation, also, with Michael, about access per
25 the mayor?

1 MS. LUCAS: Yes, I did. The mayor actually in
2 front of him asked for access in front of me and
3 Michael said, "Well, I'll see what I can do. I can
4 get you viewing access." Well, that's how he
5 pushed her off, and then after she left, he's,
6 like, "We're not giving her access." He said,
7 "We'll give her partial access." And it's kind of
8 like, she's the mayor. She's responsible for
9 everything. And he kind of just looked at me like,
10 you know, and that's when he advised me to stay
11 away from the mayor.

12 MR. BAILEY: Okay. When you were first hired,
13 were there any statements made to you about the
14 mayor?

15 MS. LUCAS: No. Because my -- the night of
16 the my interview, of course, it was open to the
17 public and everything. And then the only statement
18 was that Michael and Debbie and I were on a
19 conversation. And he just told me, he said, "You
20 need to stay away from the mayor." He said, "I'm
21 your boss. You'll report to me."

22 MR. BAILEY: And this is assistant clerk at
23 the time or the interim city administrator?

24 MS. LUCAS: Interim city manager.

25 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

1 MS. LUCAS: And my contract was I was supposed
2 to report to the mayor and Michael, but he did not
3 want me reporting to the mayor at all.

4 MR. BAILEY: Okay. So can you repeat what he
5 said verbatim?

6 MS. LUCAS: Oh, Lord. I've slept since then.
7 He told me that when she asked for access and she
8 left, he was not going to give her access. He
9 might would give her a little bit of viewing but he
10 was not going to give her full access.

11 MR. BAILEY: When who left?

12 MS. LUCAS: The mayor. When she walked out of
13 the room.

14 MR. BAILEY: Oh, okay. Wow. And then, I
15 guess, you had a meeting with Debbie and Michael?

16 MS. LUCAS: Yes. Via Teams.

17 MR. BAILEY: Okay. How did that -- were they
18 working?

19 MS. LUCAS: They were working on the budget.
20 That's all the first month basically was, was
21 working on the budget. And then there would be a
22 couple of nights that she would want to go over
23 things. And she would start here and then next
24 time, she's over on something else. So none of the
25 training would have been done on how I trained.

1 And of course, my training would be I would have an
2 agenda. And I don't know how many times she would
3 say, "Well, what do you want to learn next?" Well,
4 first off, I don't know anything about the city. I
5 can't pick that. You should be able to pick that.
6 But it was just random and sporadic training of
7 various things; whatever popped into her head.

8 MR. BAILEY: Did the access that they gave you
9 prevent you from conducting any audits or anything
10 like that, or carrying out any of the duties you
11 had?

12 MS. LUCAS: Well, without having access to
13 payroll, that's one of the big things that the
14 auditor looks at. Because they're going to verify
15 that the checks were really the checks and what's
16 on the PO is what was actually paid. And so by not
17 being able to access payroll, there's no way I
18 could, you know, see if this person was paid
19 properly or anything.

20 MR. BAILEY: Okay. You had overheard or
21 Debbie had made some comments to you about Doug
22 wanting to transfer funds?

23 MS. LUCAS: Yes. One evening, we were talking
24 and I was talking -- and we were talking about the
25 budget and we were talking about that Michael

1 wanted me to give an accounting report like at the
2 next meeting. And she said, "I'll tell you, they
3 aren't going to want anything negative." So she
4 said, "What Doug did, he instructed me to transfer
5 money from one line to another to make it look
6 good, and then as soon as the meeting was over then
7 I would transfer it back."

8 MR. BAILEY: Do you know where they were
9 transferring from?

10 MS. LUCAS: It was one line item to another
11 line item.

12 MR. BAILEY: So...

13 MS. LUCAS: Like if they were over on a line,
14 she would transfer money from a line that had
15 plenty of money in it.

16 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

17 MS. LUCAS: And then transfer it back.

18 MR. BAILEY: Let me ask you this: Were
19 they -- for instance, were they handling one part
20 of the budget at a time and then taking it to the
21 city council?

22 MS. LUCAS: When they hired me, they were
23 already at the point where they kind of already had
24 kind of a rough draft, and so we worked on that
25 rough draft. And she didn't do anything about it.

1 Michael just told her what he wanted and she just
2 plugged in the numbers. He could have done it
3 himself even without her. But now, I was at one of
4 the budget meetings or budget workshops and a
5 commission meeting while I was down there. And
6 that's basically, you know, he kind of laid out,
7 "Here's what I'm proposing," and that was about as
8 far as it went until we got to the next budget
9 hearing.

10 MR. BAILEY: Okay. Do you remember what the
11 millage rate was in the original budget?

12 MS. LUCAS: I'm trying to remember. It's
13 either 7.99 or 6.99.

14 MR. BAILEY: And was there talk about bringing
15 it down?

16 MS. LUCAS: Yes. Yes.

17 MR. BAILEY: So what concerns you about them
18 transferring the money after they send it to the
19 city council, back?

20 MS. LUCAS: Well, first of all, that's wrong,
21 ethically wrong. And, to me, that's a violation of
22 general accounting standards, because you just
23 don't do that. And if you do transfer money for
24 any reason, then you have to have a journal entry.
25 Well, see, I couldn't even get in to look at the

1 journal entries. So I couldn't tell if she had
2 actually, you know, where she had transferred it or
3 back to it or anything.

4 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And you -- I mean, does
5 that raise red flags with you if there's a lot of
6 transfers from one account to another account?

7 MS. LUCAS: Most definitely.

8 MR. BAILEY: And they're doing this to make it
9 look better for the city council.

10 MS. LUCAS: Yes. And she was instructed to do
11 this by Doug Baber.

12 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And Doug Baber quit the
13 day you got your contract?

14 MS. LUCAS: The night that they approved my
15 contract, he quit.

16 MR. BAILEY: Okay. When -- now, they changed
17 your contract at some point in here where they
18 wanted you to be in Mexico Beach?

19 MS. LUCAS: The contract never officially
20 changed. They made an offer. And their offer, I
21 countered, and that's when they kept telling me it
22 was too high and that I wasn't qualified enough to
23 do the job.

24 MR. BAILEY: Okay. But yet they entered into
25 a contract back with Debbie for 75 an hour?

1 MS. LUCAS: Yes, as a consultant.

2 MR. BAILEY: As a consultant?

3 MS. LUCAS: Uh-huh.

4 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

5 MS. LUCAS: She was supposed to train me and
6 then help with the audit, because -- she was the
7 finance director during that time period, and so
8 there were things that I wouldn't have known and
9 she would. And that's all she was supposed to do.
10 And finish up the budget with Michael.

11 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

12 MS. LUCAS: So they finished up the budget,
13 but she didn't help me any.

14 MR. BAILEY: Was there any talk about Al
15 Cathey and things that were going on with your
16 meetings and...

17 MS. LUCAS: The only things that was discussed
18 about Al Cathey -- or not with him but about him --
19 was where he was the owner of Ace Hardware. And
20 there were a lot of expenditures that went out to
21 him, and one of them I saw was for a pavilion. And
22 I don't know where the pavilion was supposed to be
23 but it was like \$60,000 or 55,000 maybe. And I
24 never saw a bid document on it, because they would
25 have had to bid something out, it being that high.

1 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

2 MS. LUCAS: And so that kind of sent a red
3 flag up. And I spoke with the mayor and the mayor
4 and I at that point was going to go in and research
5 his entire history with the City, especially while
6 he was mayor, and I could not access any of the
7 invoices or anything past '20 -- I think it's '20
8 or 2019.

9 MR. BAILEY: Give me one second, ma'am.

10 MS. LUCAS: Sure.

11 MR. BAILEY: Sorry about that.

12 MS. LUCAS: That's okay.

13 MR. BAILEY: But you -- this wasn't something
14 that you went off and thought was -- you weren't
15 trying to target the previous mayor, correct?

16 MS. LUCAS: No. We were just looking into
17 different -- wanted to look into different vendors
18 to see why they had been paid so much. And so
19 that's where we started looking at his. And then,
20 the credit card bill was another one. We were
21 going to go in and look at. Of course, I never got
22 access to all of that.

23 MR. BAILEY: But you were finding things that
24 should have gone to the counsel that never went to
25 the council for a vote?

1 MS. LUCAS: That I'm aware of, yes.

2 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

3 MS. LUCAS: It's just odd to me that this is a
4 little local-yocal hardware store, and they're
5 spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on nuts
6 and bolts and small boards and things. It just
7 seems a little out of character.

8 MR. BAILEY: So you're seeing, like, every
9 month purchases?

10 MS. LUCAS: Yes. There was every month
11 purchases. A lot of months they were just small
12 dribbles. I mean, the two months I was there, he
13 got probably \$150, \$300 a month. But we did find a
14 check. The mayor and I got ahold of a check where
15 he had spent -- I'm wanting to say between 55 and
16 60,000 and we did -- we were able to look at that
17 PO, and it showed us that it was for a pavilion.

18 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

19 MS. LUCAS: And that was over the limits. It
20 should have been bid out.

21 MR. BAILEY: Okay. Now, Michael had talked to
22 you about your counteroffer and thought that they
23 could --

24 MS. LUCAS: No. Adrian.

25 MR. BAILEY: Adrian did?

1 MS. LUCAS: Yes.

2 MR. BAILEY: Okay. Walk me through that.

3 MS. LUCAS: I was down there and we were
4 talking, and they were talking to me about would I
5 be willing to move down there, and I'm like yes.
6 So they mentioned -- I think it was 75. And I told
7 Adrian, I said, "I cannot move" -- because he come
8 up to me after the meeting and said, "Can you do
9 that?" And I said, "No. I need 85 and moving
10 expenses." He's like, "Well, I think we can do
11 that." Well, then when it came down to when they
12 actually made the offer, they offered 70, and I
13 countered with 85.

14 MR. BAILEY: So it's kind of like he got the
15 information -- maybe -- I'll let you get your
16 feeling on it. Did you think that he got that
17 information and just knew what your -- what you
18 needed and then they did a contract in the
19 opposite?

20 MS. LUCAS: They didn't do a contract. All
21 they did was an offer.

22 MR. BAILEY: An offer? Okay.

23 MS. LUCAS: Yes. And I saw it on the meeting,
24 and then Michael called me after the meeting was
25 over and told me what the offer was.

1 MR. BAILEY: Okay. Did you hear that Chris
2 Hubbard was going to be hired before he was
3 actually hired?

4 MS. LUCAS: I heard the talk was they wanted
5 to bring him back. But not like, you know,
6 definitely they were bringing him back, but they
7 most definitely made, you know, that they would
8 want to bring Chris back.

9 MR. BAILEY: But they hadn't even taken
10 applications yet?

11 MS. LUCAS: Nope.

12 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And Chris and Debbie are
13 together?

14 MS. LUCAS: Yes. They were living in
15 Barberville. And then it was really weird. The
16 night that they approved -- well, the, what, 3:2
17 vote -- that they were going to hire him, the very
18 next weekend he was there. Like, literally, he
19 would not have had time to pack his house and move
20 it.

21 MR. BAILEY: Okay. Tell me about Debbie's
22 working schedule. Did you see that a lot, or the
23 hours that she was working, or what she told you
24 the job entailed?

25 MS. LUCAS: Well, when -- she couldn't work

1 with me until after 5:00 Eastern Time.

2 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

3 MS. LUCAS: Because that's when she was
4 supposedly off-duty with the software company.

5 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

6 MS. LUCAS: And so that's when we would make
7 contact. Because I get off about 3:30, 4:00 and so
8 that worked out perfectly. Plus, it left Michael
9 time to get on. And, you know, she would -- she
10 said, "Oh, you can do it 20, 25 hours a week,"
11 which is what they told me in the beginning when I
12 actually accepted the original contract. And I
13 thought, okay, well that's not too bad, and then,
14 of course, it turned out to be false.

15 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And at some point, the
16 city commissioners made a statement that they could
17 not get ahold of you?

18 MS. LUCAS: Yes.

19 MR. BAILEY: And --

20 MS. LUCAS: They had been told that they could
21 send me an email or a text message at any time
22 during the day and I could respond to that, but I
23 could not answer the phone because I was teaching.
24 But no one ever called me except for Tammy,
25 Michael, Mary, and Julie, and then the one day I

1 called Adrian.

2 MR. BAILEY: Okay. What was your conversation
3 with Adrian?

4 MS. LUCAS: I attempted to call him, and
5 that's when he texted me and told me that he was on
6 a plane, and he couldn't talk, but he was texting
7 back and forth.

8 MR. BAILEY: Okay. What did that conversation
9 entail with the text?

10 MS. LUCAS: It was regarding a federal form
11 that had to be done, or a state form that had to be
12 done, and it was supposed to be done at, like,
13 4:00 that day.

14 MR. BAILEY: Uh-huh.

15 MS. LUCAS: And I didn't find out about it
16 until the night before. And so he couldn't help me
17 because he was like two hours out of landing, which
18 was the 4:00 time frame. So that's when I called
19 Michael and I said, "You're going to have to find
20 someone to help me." And the time -- the mayor
21 actually called, I think she called Panama City but
22 I'm not sure. She had a clerk call me and was
23 going to try and help me walk through it. Well, I
24 just got a text from Michael saying that, "We've
25 got it completed."

1 MR. BAILEY: So they didn't train you at all,
2 it seems like?

3 MS. LUCAS: No. No.

4 MR. BAILEY: Okay. Did you get taught how to
5 access stuff through the software?

6 MS. LUCAS: No. I had to mess around with it
7 and play around with it until I could get into it.

8 MR. BAILEY: And Debbie is a rep for
9 Springbrook?

10 MS. LUCAS: Correct.

11 MR. BAILEY: Is it brook or book? Springbook?

12 MS. LUCAS: Springbrook, B-R-O-O-K.

13 MR. BAILEY: B-R-O-O-K. Okay.

14 And so she goes in and basically she goes to
15 cities and places that need accounting and offers
16 the services through Springbrook?

17 MS. LUCAS: I think she's more of a trainer
18 that when -- because there at the end, she used to
19 say she would go state to state. There at the end,
20 she was doing everything remotely from Barberville.
21 And so, you know, she could train them over the
22 phone or troubleshoot them.

23 MR. BAILEY: Okay. Was there anything else
24 that was concerning while you were there at the
25 City of Mexico Beach?

1 MS. LUCAS: Just it felt like that -- first,
2 Michael was showing me around town, showing me
3 this, that and the other. But **it was really weird.**
4 **Like, he took myself and Mary out to lunch. Well,**
5 **next thing we know, in walks Adrian.** And I guess
6 either him or Mary had texted Adrian, and he had
7 showed up, and that gave him time to kind of, you
8 know, question and talk while we're just sitting
9 here shooting the breeze, basically.

10 MR. BAILEY: Did Adrian come over there and
11 talk with you?

12 MS. LUCAS: Oh, yeah. He come in and sat down
13 with us.

14 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And Jerry Smith had pulled
15 some emails of yours?

16 MS. LUCAS: He stated in the meeting when they
17 terminated my contract that he had a whole stack of
18 papers. And, of course, Michelle didn't look at
19 them and I couldn't see them. And he stated that
20 those were conversations that were emailed back and
21 forth between myself and Mary and myself and Tammy.

22 MR. BAILEY: And what would any emails related
23 to that be?

24 MS. LUCAS: It would -- there's been several
25 where I would say, "I really don't understand this.

1 Can you help me with this." Or I would ask about a
2 report or something. And so he assumed that I
3 wasn't capable of doing my job because I asked for
4 information or help with something.

5 MR. BAILEY: Well, was it because you weren't
6 trained on it?

7 MS. LUCAS: Exactly. And plus, being Florida
8 law, I'm in Kentucky. They're different. So I
9 would ask questions about different things that
10 would involve Florida that I wouldn't have up here.

11 MR. BAILEY: Uh-huh. And **who was responsible**
12 **for training you about the City?**

13 **MS. LUCAS: Debbie.**

14 **MR. BAILEY: Debbie? Was there anything that**
15 **you found, like, suspicious that she was doing?**

16 **MS. LUCAS: Lack of giving me information,**
17 **which made me feel that she was trying to keep the**
18 **knowledge and not give it to me; afraid I would be**
19 **able to look into everything too much.**

20 MR. BAILEY: Uh-huh.

21 MS. LUCAS: Because, like I said, I've trained
22 people before. And as a matter of fact, I've
23 trained the deputy finance director at Winchester,
24 and I mean, I knew exactly -- I laid out a calendar
25 for her exactly what the time frame was and what

1 had to be done, and I didn't get that.

2 MR. BAILEY: So what accounts did you not
3 have? What accounts was Debbie working on and what
4 accounts were you working on?

5 MS. LUCAS: I wasn't actually working on
6 anything. I was doing research until the last,
7 what, three weeks, maybe. And then, they kept
8 turning more power over to me that I had no clue
9 was happening. But she was doing full control
10 probably the first month or maybe even five weeks
11 that I was there.

12 MR. BAILEY: Did they ever give you full
13 power?

14 MS. LUCAS: No. Nope.

15 MR. BAILEY: And the situation -- you've been
16 a part of audits, correct?

17 MS. LUCAS: Yes.

18 MR. BAILEY: And there were the same issues
19 several years in a row?

20 MS. LUCAS: Yes. They were called repeat
21 findings. And on the third finding, from what I
22 understand with Florida law, is they're fined. And
23 none of the findings were corrected. Doug Baber
24 answered with a letter. I saw the letter, where he
25 put they were going to do this, they were going to

1 do this, they were going to do this to correct
2 these. Well, to this day, they still haven't been
3 corrected.

4 And so, we had to answer a letter on the '21
5 audit, and so it was the same thing. Debbie
6 drafted the letter, and it was the same exact
7 letter, basically, that Doug had sent the year
8 before with, you know, we're going to do this,
9 we're going to do this, and this is the time frame,
10 but it never was accomplished.

11 MR. BAILEY: And what are the ramifications or
12 the fines for not doing -- not passing this portion
13 of the audit?

14 MS. LUCAS: I'm not sure with Florida law. I
15 had been told by Debbie that if we got another
16 finding that it was going to be -- that we were
17 going to be heavily fined. And so I never actually
18 saw that I was in the middle trying to work with
19 Michelle to try and answer some of this. Well,
20 then Michael told Debbie, "Just write the letter."
21 So again, nothing has been corrected.

22 MR. BAILEY: Do you think Doug and Michael
23 were working together to keep the mayor out of
24 knowing what was going on in the city?

25 MS. LUCAS: I do. Because the mayor tried to

1 say that he basically was leaving because of
2 Michele. No, he already had something lined up.
3 You don't just get a job as a city manager that
4 fast. And then, Michael joining him just four
5 weeks later.

6 MR. BAILEY: Yeah.

7 MS. LUCAS: So it's just very suspicious.

8 MR. BAILEY: So did you have any other
9 involvement with any other city council members?

10 MS. LUCAS: Nope. Just there while I was in
11 person and over the Teams meetings.

12 MR. BAILEY: And you had gone to Adrian Welle
13 for some assistance because he was the former city
14 clerk?

15 MS. LUCAS: Correct.

16 MR. BAILEY: And did he help you?

17 MS. LUCAS: No, because he was on a plane.

18 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

19 MS. LUCAS: That's the only time I ever tried
20 to contact him, because I was trying to do my job
21 and working with Debbie to try and accomplish it,
22 which didn't go anywhere.

23 MR. BAILEY: Did you express your concerns to
24 the mayor?

25 MS. LUCAS: Yes.

1 MR. BAILEY: And you currently work for city
2 governments, correct?

3 MS. LUCAS: I did until December 31st and had
4 to retire medically.

5 MR. BAILEY: Medically retire?

6 MS. LUCAS: Yep.

7 MR. BAILEY: Great.

8 MS. LUCAS: And then I went back to work
9 teaching.

10 MR. BAILEY: So have you ever dealt with a
11 situation where a mayor has been kept out of the
12 loop?

13 MS. LUCAS: No. Our mayor always had full
14 access. If he wanted something -- he had access on
15 his computer. He never used it. He would just
16 come and demand a report, we would print him a
17 report, explain it to him, and he went on about his
18 business. But he knew everything that went on in
19 that city.

20 MR. BAILEY: Was there an effort to keep the
21 mayor out?

22 MS. LUCAS: No. Never.

23 MR. BAILEY: I'm talking about Mexico Beach.
24 Was there an effort to keep the mayor out?

25 MS. LUCAS: Oh, yes. Yes. Michael said

1 repeatedly he would give her partial access. So he
2 told her he gave her full access, but behind her
3 door, when she closed the door, it was, "We're not
4 giving her full access."

5 MR. BAILEY: And you didn't have full access
6 as the accountant?

7 MS. LUCAS: And at that point, I didn't know
8 that yet, because I was just picking my computer up
9 while I was down there.

10 MR. BAILEY: Oh, wow.

11 MS. LUCAS: Yeah.

12 MR. BAILEY: How long -- how long after you --
13 walk me through that time frame of you getting
14 hired, you getting the computer, and then you
15 officially leaving.

16 MS. LUCAS: Okay. Let me look in July. We
17 went the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th of July down
18 there, and here I was, hired in June. So it would
19 have been two weeks and I kept get the runaround
20 about the computer, getting the runaround about the
21 computer. Debbie was trying to go over the budget
22 with Michael, so they emailed me a budget to look
23 at, to follow along with, but I basically really
24 wasn't a part of it. And Michael and Debbie were
25 still having like lunchtime Zoom meetings and I was

1 excluded from those. So I had no clue what they
2 were discussing or anything else. And this was
3 after she officially quit and when she was a
4 consultant.

5 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

6 MS. LUCAS: So to me, as finance director, I
7 should have been a part of all of those meetings,
8 because that's what she was consulting on was the
9 finance aspect.

10 MR. BAILEY: But they had a separate meeting
11 with you in the evening?

12 MS. LUCAS: Yes.

13 MR. BAILEY: But it didn't concern any --

14 MS. LUCAS: I have no idea what they talked
15 about. A couple of times, as I got ready to hang
16 up, Michael said, "I'll talk to you tomorrow at
17 lunch."

18 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

19 MS. LUCAS: So...

20 MR. BAILEY: So then what occurred after you
21 got your computer? You head back to Kentucky?

22 MS. LUCAS: I did. I flew back in on the 13th
23 of July. And that next week, on Monday, is when I
24 actually started on working on Mexico Beach's
25 items. Because at that point, Debbie is telling

1 me, "Well, you need to do this, this, and this,"
2 and so I'm trying, at this point trying to figure
3 out how to get around in the software. And I
4 taught software for several years, so you know, I
5 know what I can do and what I can't do. And I was
6 working through the procedures by myself, because I
7 had to be self-taught. And, you know, I would get
8 things from Debbie, "Well, you need to do this."
9 And so, like, every morning before 11, I had to go
10 in on the computer and approve all of Mary Harmon's
11 works, which is the checks and POs and all of that.

12 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

13 MS. LUCAS: Which was difficult if I'm in the
14 middle of a class. I also had to go in and look at
15 a some kind of report that the bank had, and I
16 can't remember the name of it. But it had to be
17 approved before 11 and it kept -- it was,
18 basically, I need to go in and look at this check.
19 The bank stopped the check. Maybe it was too much
20 or maybe, you know, they never heard of this vendor
21 or whatever. I had to go in there and actually
22 manually approve it so they would pay it, which I
23 thought was a little odd but that was their
24 procedure.

25 And so every night I was working late. I

1 mean, there was a lot of nights that I started at
2 3:00 and I wouldn't get off of this computer until
3 11:30 at night.

4 And then, let me see if I have the date
5 written down. It was the first council meeting in
6 August, which would have been **the 8th of August;**
7 **that's when they terminated my contract.** So I was
8 given, what, three weeks to be able to try and work
9 on anything.

10 MR. BAILEY: Wow.

11 MS. LUCAS: Yeah. Yeah. **I, at that point,**
12 **was fed up.** And I've been a finance director for
13 **nine years, or part of nine years, and I never had**
14 **these problems. I had full access. As a matter of**
15 **fact, I was actually the admin for our software, so**
16 **I knew the software backwards and forwards and was**
17 **able to look at everything. And here, I couldn't.**

18 MR. BAILEY: **And who was the admin for**
19 **Springbrook?**

20 MS. LUCAS: **Technically, Michael, but Debbie**
21 **was the one that, you know, would create accounts**
22 **or whatever.**

23 MR. BAILEY: **Were you able to ever see the**
24 **credit card statements?**

25 MS. LUCAS: I -- **they emailed me one, but it**

1 wasn't, you know, and it wasn't the actual credit
2 card statement. It was deposits that went on the
3 credit card; never what the charges were.

4 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And are they required to
5 keep a price order or inventory of what they got
6 with that credit card? And, like, were they
7 putting the City of Mexico Beach property, like the
8 inventory or tool control of some sort?

9 MS. LUCAS: I never saw anything like that.
10 Now, when I'm doing it, back in here, is I took the
11 credit card bill, went through it, every little
12 line, and they had to have -- whatever was spent, I
13 had to have something to attach to that bill before
14 I could pay it.

15 MR. BAILEY: Did you hear rumors that were
16 going around about Debbie's past job with the City
17 of Callaway?

18 MS. LUCAS: Yes, I did.

19 MR. BAILEY: What did you hear?

20 MS. LUCAS: That she had been creating
21 accounts in Chris Hubbard's name and was putting
22 money over there like she was paying a bill, and
23 then somebody caught on to it, and when they got
24 ready to let her go, she had already put the money
25 back and closed out that account. So she didn't

1 have to pay any kind of legal -- they couldn't
2 arrest her or anything else or didn't choose to
3 press charges.

4 MR. BAILEY: Do you know who you heard that
5 from?

6 MS. LUCAS: I heard it from one lady that, you
7 know, a citizen, and then also the mayor. And I'm
8 thinking -- well, not all of it was exposed, but
9 The Beach Comber had some information regarding
10 her.

11 MR. BAILEY: The Beach Comber?

12 MS. LUCAS: Uh-huh. That's the newspaper.
13 It's online.

14 MR. BAILEY: Okay. I'm going to look into
15 that. Is there anything else that you think I need
16 to know or -- I'm going to ask you: **Do you think**
17 **there's something fraudulent going on?**

18 MS. LUCAS: **In my humble opinion, yes. And**
19 **another reason I think that is because of how they**
20 **hired Chris back.** They got 18 applications, even
21 one from me, and they picked out these top five
22 people. Well, in this process, Mr. -- not
23 Mr. Willie -- Mr. Wolff and Mr. Smith called these
24 people. Two of them traffic dropped out, period.
25 And they interviewed Chris and one more, I think,

1 and -- out of all 18 applications. The other one
2 that they interviewed had most recent governmental
3 experience, and he also had a degree and he had,
4 you know, longer years of experience; where Chris
5 has no degree and has been out of governmental --
6 or government work since -- for ten years. So I
7 mean, if you're looking apples to apples, that
8 became an orange. But yet, they hired him instead
9 of the other gentleman that was more qualified.

10 MR. BAILEY: Do you think there's something
11 fraudulent with the accounting and why it seems
12 like every city administrator that's been in there
13 has tried to keep the mayor out?

14 MS. LUCAS: Yeah, I do. Because why would you
15 want to keep the mayor out? You know, that's the
16 person that is over all of the finances for the
17 city. It's the CFO. And that person should have
18 full access to this so why are they stopping it,
19 you know? What reason are they stopping it? So,
20 to me, that throws up a big red flag.

21 MR. BAILEY: Okay. And plus, you -- you've
22 already said the transferring of money from one
23 account to another --

24 MS. LUCAS: That was a major red flag.

25 MR. BAILEY: And Debbie is the one that told

1 you that Doug was telling her to do this?

2 MS. LUCAS: Correct. That was out of her own
3 mouth.

4 MR. BAILEY: So if I'm not mistaken, when the
5 City gets their budget and they're looking at it,
6 it could be fraudulent when they're talking about
7 it at the meeting?

8 MS. LUCAS: Yes. Because it's -- it's more of
9 the reports. When they're looking at the monthly
10 reports, they will be able to see what accounts
11 have went over, what accounts are under, and what
12 accounts are running right at budget.

13 MR. BAILEY: Uh-huh.

14 MS. LUCAS: And that's why he was having her
15 move the monies so that certain accounts, if they
16 went above, he didn't get questioned about it.
17 Because the council did not like negative accounts.
18 Well, through budget, sometimes you have negative
19 accounts.

20 MR. BAILEY: Were there negative accounts?

21 MS. LUCAS: I was told there was. I never saw
22 a report.

23 MR. BAILEY: So with the mayor saying that
24 we're in a financial crisis, it seems like it, in
25 your opinion?

1 MS. LUCAS: The crisis was the suspicion of
2 fraud and all of the underhandedness that was going
3 on. And so that's why the financial crisis come
4 about is because we truly don't know what they
5 have. Then there was --

6 MR. BAILEY: The keeping out of books.

7 MS. LUCAS: Right. And then the -- Oh, what
8 is it, the money that they got through the
9 hurricanes. I can't even think of the name of it.

10 MR. BAILEY: FEMA?

11 MS. LUCAS: Yes. The FEMA funds. And there
12 was really no recordkeeping of the FEMA funds, not
13 like it should have been. They have a third-party
14 or something that does some stuff but they just
15 took it at their word and never bothered to check
16 up on it and follow up on it.

17 MR. BAILEY: Who was the third-party?

18 MS. LUCAS: I don't remember the name. It was
19 somebody that they hired that actually did all of
20 the FEMA work, you know. They requested the monies
21 and all of these different things. So the City
22 didn't actually -- they never knew what they had in
23 FEMA. And they weren't returning FEMA funds.
24 Like, if it was earmarked for a certain project and
25 it didn't come in at that amount, then those funds

1 should have been either sent back or approval for
2 reallocation. And to my knowledge, it was never
3 done. I know they never sent any back.

4 MR. BAILEY: Walk me through -- break that
5 down, like, the earmark. Was it because the
6 project came in over what FEMA was willing to pay
7 for it?

8 MS. LUCAS: No. Normally, they were coming in
9 under budget, so there was residual funds left that
10 should have went back to FEMA so that FEMA could
11 use it for another project. Or the City could
12 request reallocation, if there was another project
13 that qualified under the FEMA guidelines.

14 MR. BAILEY: Oh. So basically, failure to
15 return FEMA funds?

16 MS. LUCAS: Right. But it was more failure to
17 maintain records to see if they needed to return
18 it. Because I asked for FEMA record and I was
19 given the runaround. Because FEMA is pretty
20 serious stuff.

21 MR. BAILEY: Yeah. Could that have been
22 the -- okay. And none of those records you could
23 find in the computer?

24 MS. LUCAS: No. I couldn't see anything on
25 those.

1 MR. BAILEY: And that had to do with your
2 audit?

3 MS. LUCAS: Yes. That would have been
4 something that would have come up in the audit.

5 MR. BAILEY: And you taking over as the
6 accountant, you would want to know and look back
7 and make sure that there's no fraud from the
8 previous years that could be blamed on you?

9 MS. LUCAS: Right. Well, the mayor had
10 challenged me to look into potential fraud, because
11 it was already suspected, so FEMA was a big one we
12 were looking at. Well, I mean, if you don't have
13 records, you can't track what's coming in and what
14 you've expended out. And the auditors are going to
15 want to see that.

16 MR. BAILEY: Did that start when that pavilion
17 invoice came about?

18 MS. LUCAS: Yes.

19 MR. BAILEY: Wasn't that a FEMA project?

20 MS. LUCAS: It is. But I never could find
21 where that they had applied for any kind of
22 reimbursement for those funds.

23 MR. BAILEY: Was the pavilion actually built?

24 MS. LUCAS: I have no knowledge.

25 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

1 MS. LUCAS: The mayor can tell you whether it
2 was or not.

3 MR. BAILEY: Okay. But that was already
4 bid out to another company?

5 MS. LUCAS: No. Ace Hardware provided
6 everything for that pavilion.

7 MR. BAILEY: Who built it?

8 MS. LUCAS: I have no clue. I don't know if
9 their public works guys built it. All I know is it
10 was the charge for the materials for the pavilion.

11 MR. BAILEY: But that should have then, again,
12 gone to the council.

13 MS. LUCAS: It should have been bid out for
14 the materials. Then it should have been bid out --
15 if they were using a supplier or a contractor, they
16 would have had to bid it out as well for the
17 building of it or the construction of it.

18 MR. BAILEY: Have you heard that Al Cathey's
19 son is a contractor?

20 MS. LUCAS: I have. And I've also been told
21 that he received numerous jobs and without bidding.
22 Or, if he did bid, he managed to find out what bids
23 were and somehow undercut them.

24 MR. BAILEY: Who told you that?

25 MS. LUCAS: That came from the mayor.

1 MR. BAILEY: Okay. But she was told that by
2 other people?

3 MS. LUCAS: Correct.

4 MR. BAILEY: Okay.

5 MS. LUCAS: Well, she served on the P and Z
6 board.

7 MR. BAILEY: Planning and zoning?

8 MS. LUCAS: Correct. Yes.

9 MR. BAILEY: Okay. So did them keeping the
10 mayor out of the books start her to start looking
11 harder?

12 MS. LUCAS: Yes. Because at that point, she's
13 like, "Something is going on if they don't want me
14 to see it."

15 MR. BAILEY: Yeah. Where there's smoke,
16 there's fire, right?

17 MS. LUCAS: Right. Especially in accounting.

18 MR. BAILEY: Okay. Is there anything else you
19 think I need to know?

20 MS. LUCAS: Not that I can think of right now
21 off my head.

22 MR. BAILEY: How did the mayor treat the
23 employees of the city?

24 MS. LUCAS: I never saw her mistreat one
25 employee. She was always cordial. And I know she

1 kind of sternly talked to Michael one time, but it
2 was something that he had done and she asked him to
3 do and he hadn't done. So, you know, that was kind
4 of only time I ever saw her, you know, kind of be
5 snippy. Or at the council meetings when the guys
6 were trying to talk over and they would not abide
7 by Robert's rules of order.

8 MR. BAILEY: All righty, ma'am. Is there
9 anything else you think you need to add or that I
10 need to know?

11 MS. LUCAS: Not that can I think of. If you
12 need me, you know you can just call.

13 MR. BAILEY: All righty. Thank you, ma'am.
14 And --

15 MS. LUCAS: You're welcome.

16 MR. BAILEY: And can you read or waive this
17 transcript. If you want I can get you a copy if
18 you want to read it and send the court reporter --

19 MS. LUCAS: I can waive it, because I've told
20 you everything in honest and truth, and I'm good
21 with that.

22 MR. BAILEY: All righty. That would be in
23 case you said "the" instead of "then" or the court
24 reporter -- if you want it, we can get it for you.

25 MS. LUCAS: It's not necessary. You can

1 always provide it to Michele.

2 MR. BAILEY: All righty. Thank you so much,
3 ma'am.

4 MS. LUCAS: Thank you. Have a good evening.

5 MR. BAILEY: You too.

6 (Statement concluded.)

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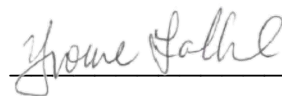
CERTIFICATE

STATE OF FLORIDA)
COUNTY OF LEON)

I, YVONNE LaFLAMME, RPR, FPR, certify that I was authorized to and did stenographically transcribe this written transcript from the playback of recording of the foregoing statement of MICHELLE LUCAS; that I was not present during the proceedings; and that the foregoing transcript was transcribed and has been done so to the best of my ability from what was clearly audible.

I further certify that I am not a relative, employee, attorney, or counsel of any of the parties, nor am I a relative or employee of any of the parties' attorney or counsel connected with the action, nor am I financially interested in the action.

DATED this 25th day of SEPTEMBER, 2023.



YVONNE LaFLAMME, RPR, FPR
Court Reporter

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