



Angry taxpayer questions Knox County Mayor about spending

News

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A Knox County taxpayer is taking on Mayor Mike Ragsdale, asking the Knox County leader dozens of questions about spending.

Lewis Cosby is an inactive CPA who at one time professionally audited Knox County.

Cosby says he's not playing politics. He says he has no political ambitions of his own and isn't asking Mayor Ragsdale to resign.

However, he says he couldn't ignore what he read and saw in the news about taxpayer-funded travel and entertainment costs.

Cosby had to see for himself who bought what with their county credit cards.

"In all my career, these records, as to expenditures and lack of documentation, is some of the worst I've ever seen," Cosby explained.

An exchange with Mayor Ragsdale that was broadcast on Hallerin Hill's morning radio show on WNOX-FM 100.3 earlier in July made Cosby take action.

"I was listening and Mayor Ragsdale said some things I didn't think were correct," Cosby explained.

Cosby had been on the show the previous week. He decided to call in and question Mayor Ragsdale, who was a guest on the show that morning.

Lewis pressed Mayor Ragsdale, who said it would have cost taxpayers more, if his staff members had claimed per diem.

"Knox County would have owed them money in most cases," Mayor Ragsdale explained to listeners.

"Do you have details on that? Is that available for review?" Cosby asked the Mayor.

Mayor Ragsdale responded to Cosby, "Come on up anytime. I've never met you, I'd like to have a chance to talk with you."

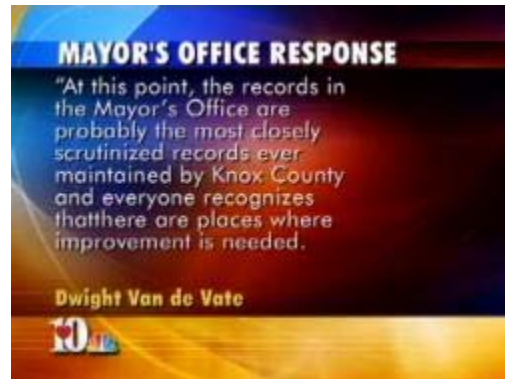
"I'll do it," Lewis finished the 4-5 minute exchange. "I'll be there next week."

Cosby kept his word. He spent hours at Knox County's Purchasing Office, reviewing pages of documents.

"Records are missing, receipts are missing, entire statements for certain people are missing," Cosby explained his findings.

He also says the Mayor's Office wasn't following purchasing card rules or the Knox County travel policy.

So far, he's given the mayor a list of 59 questions about credit cards. And Cosby says his review isn't complete.



200.43		63.39	-4,278.05
1,500.00	1,500.00	200.43	-4,400.00
250.00	250.00		-2,900.00
250.00	250.00		-2,725.00
1,000.00	1,000.00		-2,400.00
350.00			-1,400.00
1,200.00		350.00	-1,000.00
720.00		1,255.00	-2,000.00
520.00		720.00	-2,210.00
1,000.00	1,000.00	520.00	-4,200.00
322.61			-3,300.00
2,000.00	2,000.00	322.61	-3,655.00
			-1,655.00
		60,210.00	60,872.00
			-1,655.00

He also submitted a list of questions about the hospitality account. The mayor controls that fund, and donors contribute to it to cover special events.

"The hospitality account is negative," Cosby says.

As 10News reported, that account is now technically in the red.

A \$5,000 bill that was supposed to be taken out of the Hospitality Account wasn't. The Mayor's Printing budget actually covered the bill for the Homeland Security Brochure.

That left money in the hospitality fund that has since covered meals and alcohol at high-end restaurants.

The Mayor's Office says the current balance is \$3,344.11.

However, if the cost of the brochure is subtracted from the hospitality account now, the fund will be \$1,655.89 in the hole.

Cosby says that based on the dates of those transactions, the fund has actually been overdrawn for two years.

He can't understand why the Mayor's Office kept spending.

"I shouldn't have to figure this out," Cosby explains. "And I think anybody that kept a checkbook would have figured this out, but the records weren't kept. I'm not the only person upset about this. I think the average taxpayer is upset about this."

Cosby still hasn't met with Mayor Ragsdale, but the Mayor's Office is supposed to reply in 10 to 15 working days.

Spokesman Dwight Van de Vate released this statement this evening:

"At this point, the records in the Mayor's Office are probably the most closely scrutinized records ever maintained by Knox County and everyone recognizes that there are places where improvement is needed. Obviously we don't shy away from scrutiny."

Note: Cosby also ran a number of TV and radio stations in Knoxville, but he never had a business relationship with WBIR.

