

Rep. Finnell investigated Lawmaker denies mishandling funds

AUSTIN (AP) — Travis County investigators are looking into allegations that a Texas lawmaker, Rep. Charles Finnell, collected state money for car trips he didn't take and conducted personal and political business at state expense, a newspaper reported Tuesday.

Two former aides to Rep. Charles Finnell, D-Holliday, said they have been contacted by authorities and asked to cooperate in the investigation, the *Austin American-Statesman* reported.

Earlier, the two raised questions about the use of state funds by Finnell, who has adamantly denied any wrongdoing, House Speaker Gib Lewis also has defended Finnell.

Another former aide has been contacted by investigators, her husband told the newspaper.

Finnell said the allegations come from "disgruntled former employees" and are untrue.

"If the district attorney's office is interested in this matter, they haven't told me or contacted me in any way," he said. "However, if they feel that it is necessary to make some inquiries, I would be happy to cooperate fully with that office."

Travis County District Attorney Ronald Earle and Mike Lynch, head of Earle's Public Integrity Unit, did not immediately return a telephone call from the Associated Press.

The *American-Statesman* quotes sources familiar with the investigation as saying the probe focuses on allegations about Finnell that were disclosed in a Nov. 14 story by the newspaper.

In the story, former aide Lisa Fasano said Finnell had instructed her to fill out state travel forms to be reimbursed for driving on legislative business, when she said he actually flew free with friends or family.

She said Finnell also conducted personal business on state long-distance lines and that she typed envelopes and handled correspondence for Finnell's real estate business on state time.

Fasano, who now works in New York, referred questions to her attorney, Charles Johanson of Austin. He confirmed that investigators contacted her within the past week.

Charles Waters, Finnell's former administrative assistant, said he was contacted twice. He earlier echoed Fasano's allegations about the falsified travel claims.

A third former employee, Dorothy Green, also has been contacted,

the *American-Statesman* reported. She refused to comment but her husband, Tim Green, said she declined to cooperate.

Finnell is a 20-year House veteran who heads the House Rules and Resolutions Committee.

The *American-Statesman* in October reported that Finnell, as chairman of the House General Investigating Committee during 1987 and 1988, spent the panel's entire \$40,000 budget, although the committee met only once.

Finnell said he did nothing wrong. He said he personally investigated hundreds of tips, then destroyed the records.

Speaker Lewis defended Finnell as "a dedicated and committed public servant who has made great sacrifices to serve the people of this state."

Program educates teachers

A program to strengthen education in the Bryan and College Station school districts is underway in Brazos County.

The Brazos Elementary Science Improvement Project offers hands-on experience to principals and teachers in both districts in hopes of bettering teaching.

Dinah Chancellor, BESIP coordinator for the Bryan Independent School District, said experiencing science seems to be the key to developing a future in science.

"We're not producing the kind of adults who want to be life-long learners," Chancellor said. "Our

Ultimately, BESIP will make a better-educated set of adults who will walk wisely into the 21st century."

— Dinah Chancellor, BESIP coordinator

principals are our forefronts, and change doesn't happen unless the forefront is a leader."

She said attitudes and teaching habits need to be changed. BESIP's purpose is to change these attitudes and prepare youth for the future, she said.

"Ultimately, BESIP will make a better-educated set of adults who will walk wisely into the 21st century," said Chancellor.

The first workshop for principals was Dec. 5, and the next will be Jan. 11 in Rudder Tower.

Workshops for elementary teachers and in-service workshops will be every Saturday beginning in June and ending in February. These teachers will receive six hours of advanced academic training for college credit.

A two-week summer institute for 60 elementary teachers from both districts will be in June. The workshops will provide teachers with ideas they can take back to their classrooms and teach.

Last year, BESIP was successful as a rural project. This is the first time it has been tried in Brazos County.

BESIP is supported by Texas A&M University, the Bryan and College Station independent school districts and a grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Ivie envisions master's program for SCOM, Theater Arts majors

The new head of Texas A&M's Department of Speech Communication and Theater Arts said he plans to help establish a master's program in the department.

Robert Ivie, who received a doctorate in rhetoric and communication from Washington State University, begins duties as department head Jan. 15. He takes the

position previously held by Dr. Kurt Ritter, who leaves in January to participate in a research project.

Ivie said the first item on his agenda is establishing a master's program. He said the program has been approved by the Board of Regents and is being considered by the Texas State Coordinating Board for Higher Education.

"I will continue to strengthen the undergraduate program and the faculty to eventually have a strong enough department to offer a doctoral degree," he said.

The speech communication and theater arts department was formed in September 1985, and was only one year old when Ivie joined the A&M faculty.

"Since the department was founded, growth has been phenomenal," Ivie said.

He said 200 students were majoring in speech communication when he arrived, and now enrollment of speech communication majors has climbed to 650.

Ivie said that to meet demands of growth in the department, it is time to expand the programs offered.

The need for people with good communication skills is growing. Students receiving degrees in speech communication and theater arts are finding themselves marketable, Ivie said.

"Since the department was founded, growth has been phenomenal."

— Robert Ivie, department head

'Bill, you squeaked by' Commissioners reinstate Ross

LUBBOCK (AP) — County commissioners reinstated Bill Ross as justice of the peace after Ross accidentally quit. But just barely.

Ross announced at a news conference last Thursday that he was running for the Republican nomination for county judge.

He renounced his candidacy a few hours later, after he learned of a clause in the Texas Constitution that says a county official with more than a year left on his term cannot announce for another public office without forfeiting his current job.

Ross' current term expires at the end of 1990. He has held the job since 1982.

But despite his longevity, commissioners reinstated him by only a 3-2 vote. The two commissioners who voted against him said they wanted to accept applications for the job before choosing the best-qualified candidate.

Before the vote, County Judge Rod Shaw, the head commissioner, asked Ross if he was still a candidate for county judge.

"Well, judge, that's kind of a

tough question right now," Ross answered. "As far as I'm concerned, I'm not."

Shaw, who is retiring at the end of this term, broke a 2-2 tie by voting to reappoint Ross.

"Bill, you squeaked by," Shaw told Ross after the vote.

The vote followed several days of squabbling over whether Ross had officially announced his candidacy.

Some suggested the announcement wasn't official until Ross had paid his filing fee or hired a campaign treasurer.

Trees

(Continued from page 1)

sists of the mover digging around the tree and then using some kind of material to hold the soil around the tree. Some horticulturists believe the ball-and-burlap method reduces shock to the tree.

Dr. Fred Davies, associate professor of horticulture at A&M, said, "Anytime you dig up a tree, you've lost 95 percent of its root system. That's very traumatic for the tree."

The box method "involves digging a large trench around the tree and then coming up underneath it with a box," Hodge said. "We feel it has a higher likelihood of success."

Dr. Benton Story, professor of horticulture at A&M, said, "I don't believe anyone could transfer those

"I sure wish they would have put on their jackets and come down off the 8th floor so they could see proof that my method works."

— John Hoelzel, tree mover

big trees. But, if anyone could do it, (Hoelzel) could."

Hoelzel said he believes both methods are adequate, but the box-

and-burlap method would save the University money.

He also said that by using his method trees can be moved long distances and can live up to three years without being planted.

"I brought a 60,000 pound tree with a 14-foot rootball diameter that has been alive for three years this way all the way from Dallas," he said. "The Rudder oaks are only going to be moved 60 to 75 feet."

Hoelzel said he was upset to find out that the methods he learned at A&M are "not adequate."

"I have the best interest of A&M at heart and I sincerely believe I could move all 12 trees successfully."

"The project is scheduled to begin Dec. 18," Hoelzel said. "I hope the trees survive."

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