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LSU professor, Dr. T. L. Ritchie, blows off Interior Design Board meeting. Avoiding more payroll fraud inquiries?



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Dr. T. L. Ritchie, Associate Professor of LSU's Interior Design Department, failed to attend the August 13, 2015 meeting of the Louisiana Interior Design Board (IDB), on which she serves as Vice Chairman. Further, she failed to extend the common courtesy to advise her colleagues that she would not attend. Fifty-three (53) minutes into the meeting, as Dr. Ritchie's customary agenda item was about to be discussed and near the meeting's conclusion, Executive Director Sandy Edmonds telephoned Dr. Ritchie to inquire of her status. Video of the phone call to Ritchie follows:

Ritchie No Show



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Edmonds calls Ritchie to inquire on her status.

So, why did Ritchie, whose attendance at design board meetings has become **very** erratic of late, blow off the meeting? *Sound Off Louisiana* provides the likely answer in the remainder of this post.

Rev. Freddie Lee Phillips became suspicious that IDB Executive Director Edmonds was committing IDB payroll fraud and, on November 5, 2010, he received [this one-page response](#) to his FOIA request to evaluate potential fraud. On November 20, 2010 Phillips' findings, along with a plethora of other payroll-related documentation, were submitted to Mr. Patrick Lowery, then-Chief of Accountability of Louisiana Civil Service. Lowery was provided with evidence that Edmonds was routinely taking vacations to Disneyworld, going shopping, enjoying outings to the beach, all while claiming to be on the clock. Phillips expressed his concern that the IDB and the Louisiana Auctioneer Licensing Board (LALB), on which he served at the time, were acting illegally by declaring Edmonds **"on the clock"** merely because she had a cell phone on her person and would be **"on call"** to either work or indicate she'd deal with any issues upon her return to the IDB office (often the following week upon her return from vacationing at the beach, etc.).

Lowery indicated that, if Edmonds were classified, he would commence formal action to substantiate payroll fraud; however, since she is unclassified, Civil Service has no jurisdiction to prosecute such, as he termed it, "blatant payroll fraud." He also inquired, "how could any board be so stupid as to permit something like this?" Since his office had no jurisdiction to prosecute Edmonds, he recommended Phillips submitting his material to either the Legislative Auditor's Office (LAO) or the Office of Inspector General (OIG). Accordingly, Phillips, along with LALB former Executive Director Sherrie Wilks and myself, began periodically secretly meeting with Calvin Moore at the LAO to provide him with payroll records obtained via FOIA by either Phillips, me, or both.

Meanwhile, as evidenced in the following video clip, Phillips encountered extreme hostility by his colleagues on the LALB for his assertion that it's a matter of **"business ethics"** for Ms. Edmonds to be **working** rather than **on call** to work. Additionally, then-LALB Chairman Ken Comer threatened to sue Phillips over his inquiry entailing LALB attorney Anna Dow, who is responsible for establishing Edmonds' lucrative work arrangements, potentially engaging in "misappropriation of funds" by invoicing the LALB for attendance at conferences when she had no prior LALB authorization to do so. Also in the video below, the entirety of which transpired at the January 10, 2011 LALB meeting, is Edmonds insisting that documents be destroyed to block Phillips' ability to seek them from the LALB! Here are the pertinent excerpts from that meeting:

Phillips Investigate Edmonds



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[May 2016](#)

[April 2016](#)

[February 2016](#)

[January 2016](#)

[December 2015](#)

[November 2015](#)

[October 2015](#)

[September 2015](#)

[August 2015](#)

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[June 2015](#)

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Phillips hammers his fellow LALB members regarding “**business ethics**” and them permitting Edmonds to be on vacations, running errands, etc., while claiming to be “on the clock.” Phillips also challenged whether an invoice of attorney Anna Dow constituted a “misappropriation of funds.” As a result, Chairman Comer and Dow threaten to sue Phillips, which they followed up [in writing](#). Finally, Edmonds seeks LALB approval for the destruction of public records, which the LALB approved with Phillips being the only dissenting vote.

[Editor’s Note: Edmonds’ claim above that there have been “no other complaints” — other than Oak View — regarding her never being in the office to serve the public is FLATLY false!! Illinois auctioneer Dan Mahaney lost over \$30,000 due to Edmonds’ lax attitude and steadfast resolve to refrain from working to actually earn her pay. [CLICK HERE](#) for more details on the misfortune Mr. Mahaney suffered as a result of Edmonds’ total lack of work ethic!]

Phillips reported Dow and Comer’s threats to sue him to the Office of Risk Management (who would have to defend Phillips in any suit filed by Comer). As a result, Comer’s LALB membership was severed only days after the January 10, 2011 meeting depicted above. Meanwhile, Phillips continued to pursue the LAO investigation with Calvin Moore. Unaware of the LAO investigation, Edmonds and Dow engaged in a full-court press to strip Phillips of his auction license and smear his name with the LALB for his making public records requests of the LALB and IDB and for his routine practice of attending IDB meetings and exercising his right to videotaped them. The following video clip contains excerpts from the July 18, 2011 LALB meeting and the August 11, 2011 IDB meeting to substantiate those efforts on the parts of Dow and Edmonds:

Dow Edmonds Smear Phillips



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Dow encourages LALB to hire attorney to pursue Phillips' auction license if he doesn't back off public records requests. She even says, "you were a good board member, and I don't know why you've suddenly taken on all these requests." Meanwhile, Edmonds indicates that she has hired EBRP Sheriff Deputy Ronald Landry as a direct result of Phillips' attendance at IDB meetings and his desire to videotape same.

Phillips' LAO material and interviews with Moore resulted in the LAO informing both the LALB and IDB in early November of 2011 that it would commence with an on-site investigation of alleged payroll fraud at both boards. As a result, the IDB went into full-blown panic mode. They hurriedly scheduled a **clandestine** meeting (which was never noticed to the public via LaTrac) on November 17, 2011, drafted (but never uploaded to LaTrac) an initial agenda devoid of any action regarding Edmonds and payroll practices, then [added an agenda item as the first order of business at the clandestine meeting to approve an "employment agreement" for Edmonds](#). That employment agreement, an [executed copy of which went into immediate effect](#) did nothing more than **formalize Edmonds' ability to commit payroll fraud**. Dr. Ritchie served as a witness on the document, and she even voted in favor of openly permitting Edmonds payroll fraud!

On February 29, 2012, the LAO released [this damning payroll report](#). Legislative Auditor Daryl Purpera also submitted his findings to EBRP District Attorney Hillar Moore for potential criminal prosecution of Edmonds (though he indicated she had a "get out of jail free card" due to the derelict actions of both boards). Moore, in turn, turned the matter over to the Office of Inspector General (OIG). Although LALB Vice Chairman James Sims was concerned about the LAO report's contents and potential criminal implications thereof, as evidenced by the following audio tape of March 19, 2012, Dow puts his mind at ease by indicating that Gov. Bobby Jindal's office has directed LALB members not to worry about Purpera's report. Further, Edmonds is heard on the following audio clip making light of the whole matter by explaining Jindal's intervention on her behalf in saying, "welcome to politics.":

LAO politics per Sandy

Dow indicates Jindal has said to essentially ignore payroll fraud identified by LAO. Meanwhile, Edmonds explains Jindal's intervention in defiance of


the LAO's order to recover overpayments made to her as "welcome to politics."

As mentioned above, Dr. Ritchie, who was Chairman of the LSU Interior Design Department at the time, signed the employment agreement formalizing Edmonds' ability to commit payroll fraud. Almost immediately after the release of the LAO report, Dr. Ritchie "stepped down" (that's the only public explanation she provided) as Chair of the LSU Interior Design Department and became a mere Associate Professor. The timing of Dr. Ritchie "stepping down" is certainly interesting, as is the fact that her act of "stepping down" also entailed a 31% salary reduction, from \$97,000/year down to \$66,000/year!

On December 9, 2013, the OIG issued [this damning report](#) indicating Edmonds was routinely being paid "while performing no public purpose." The report also indicated that Edmonds lied to OIG investigators regarding the practice. The report was originally scheduled to be released in early November of 2013; however, Jindal must approve all such reports. OIG Investigator Rob Chadwick indicated his initial report had to be "almost totally re-written." Obviously, Jindal, who has to approve all such reports, wasn't about to sign off on criminal prosecution of Edmonds (particularly in light of the fact a recording exists wherein he intervened to permit her to engage in the practice). Given his delusional Presidential aspirations, he could not withstand appointees of his actively promoting payroll fraud! Although the final wording of the report, which was obviously **heavily** watered down from its original content, did chastise Edmonds for engaging in the payroll fraud and for lying to OIG investigators about it, Jindal would only sign off on "suggestions" for improvement of both offices' payroll practices. To date, neither board has even publicly acknowledged the existence of the OIG report, much less discussed specific measures to effect change.

Phillips was not about to stop his crusade with the release of the OIG report. He showed up at the February 27, 2014 IDB meeting, and two board members, Karen Hazel (wife of [Louisiana State Representative Chris Hazel](#)) and Marion Johnston lambasted Phillips for all of his inquiries on IDB matters. There are no adequate words to describe their hostility toward him, so the following video demonstrates it:

Phillips IDB022714





IDB Members Karen Hazel and Marion Johnston vent their frustration toward Phillips on the heels of a damning OIG report for which he provided the critical material citing Executive Director Sandy Edmonds for payroll fraud.

Rev. Phillips is fond of saying, "the truth has no error." *Sound Off Louisiana* commends Rev. Phillips for his tenacity to report wrongdoing in the form of criminal payroll fraud entailing the IDB and LALB. Even when faced with threats against his auction license (by none other than the LALB attorney), he remained steadfast! Consequently, an esteemed LSU professor, who "stepped down" from an LSU Chairmanship and incurred a 31% reduction in pay in doing so, and who teaches a supposedly-professional field, is apparently now afraid to even attend meetings out of fear of more scrutiny by Phillips. That fact is readily apparent from Ritchie's spotty attendance subsequent to the LAO report released on February 29, 2012.

For readers who may want further details on the IDB payroll fraud, feel free to [click on this link](#).

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Laura Adley

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