

State inspector general asked to review roll call complaint

BY TED GRIGGS

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The state inspector general is being asked to look into a complaint that two members of the Louisiana Auctioneers Licensing Board responded to a Nov. 5 meeting roll call by saying “I’s here” and “I’s here, too.”

Former board member Freddie Phillips, who is black, said the comments were aimed at him. Phillips said he regularly attends meetings, and that the comments came at the first meeting he has missed in four years. Phillips later listened to a recording of the meeting sent to him by another former board member, who also forwarded it to the Jindal administration.

“We have asked the inspector general to investigate these claims,” Shannon Bates, a spokeswoman for the Jindal administration, said in an email.

“I was shocked, stunned that board members would behave in such an unprofessional manner,” Phillips said.

Phillips said one would think that things have changed, that people in Louisiana, and the rest of the country, would have moved past this sort of behavior. Listening to the recording of the meeting was almost like repeating “the torture” of the 1960s, Phillips said of hearing the roll call responses after the names of Auctioneers Licensing Board Vice Chairman James Sims and board member Greg Bordelon were called out.

Sims declined to comment for the story.

Bordelon denied making the remark.

“I know I never said that. I never heard nobody say it either,” Bordelon said.

Bordelon said former board member Robert Burns is trying to stir up controversy in an effort to make the Auctioneers Board look bad.

Bordelon said Burns has been a thorn in the board’s side ever since Gov. Bobby Jindal kicked Burns off a few years ago. Burns and Phillips have formed the Louisiana Association of Professional Auctioneers as an alternative to the Louisiana Auctioneers Association.

Burns emailed a copy of the recording, which he obtained from the Auctioneers Board, to The Advocate. The Advocate also obtained a recording of the meeting from the

Auctioneers Board. On both recordings, the responses after Sims' and Bordelon's names are called out are clear, and each is accompanied by a chuckle.

Burns also emailed the audio to the Jindal administration, at Phillips' request.

Of those present at the Nov. 5 meeting, Chairwoman Tessa Steinkamp and board members Charles Clayton Brister and Hal McMillin referred questions about the roll call to attorneys.

Attorney Larry Bankston said he has not spoken to State Inspector General Stephen Street Jr. but the board plans to cooperate fully with Street's office.

About the only thing the inspector general can do is make a report, Bankston said.

Bankston, who attended the Nov. 5 board meeting, said he didn't pay attention during roll call and didn't remember the remarks. But after listening to the recording, Bankston said he does not believe the board members' remarks were malicious.

Board member Darlene Jacobs Levy said she does not recall the other board members saying "I's here."

However, Jacobs equated saying "I's here" to New Orleans Saints fans' use of "Who Dat?"

"People use colloquy. White and black use 'I's here,' etc.," Jacobs said. "People use that. A lot of the white people imitate African-Americans."

The Auctioneers Board consists of seven members: five licensed auctioneers and two non-licensed consumers. All are appointed by the governor and must be confirmed by the Senate.

Sims, a Farmerville resident, is an auctioneer. Bordelon, a Lake Arthur resident, is a consumer representative.

Jindal reappointed both men to the board in January.

Phillips was appointed by Jindal to the board and served during the governor's first term. Phillips said if the Jindal administration doesn't take action, this kind of behavior will continue.

"These are things that professional people shouldn't do I think the administration needs to screen the candidates it appoints for these kinds of positions," Phillips said.

