

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

On January 7, 2021, Special Agent (SA) Eric A. Kuusela with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office (SFO), was instructed by Resident Agent in Charge (RAC) Greg Monk to review a citizen complaint documented in FDLE Case number FM-73-1000, Investigative Report (IR) number 85, regarding a possible Sunshine Law violation (Chapter 286 F.S.S.) in Manatee County, Florida.

SA Kuusela reviewed the information contained in FDLE Case Number FM-73-1000, IR 85, which contained the following information:

On December 11, 2020, FDLE SA David Sarney contacted Michael Barfield in reference to a possible Sunshine Law violation by several Manatee County Commissioners.

The substance of Barfield's complaint was that four (4) Manatee County Commissioners conspired to reverse a controversial land purchase and to have the county administrator fired. Barfield advised SA Sarney that he had thousands of pages of relevant documents to include telephone records, text messages, and transcripts.

On December 14, 2020, SA Sarney received an email from Barfield with a summary of alleged misconduct by commissioners.

SA Kuusela reviewed all of the relevant information provided by Barfield and found that Manatee County Commissioners James Satcher, George Kruse, Vanessa Baugh and Kevin Van Ostenbridge were the commissioners referenced by Barfield's complaint.

Barfield's complaint was originally sent to the Twelfth Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office for review. State Attorney Ed Brodsky contacted the FDLE and made a request for the FDLE to conduct an inquiry into Barfield's Sunshine Law complaint.

Attached to this Investigative Report (IR) in the Related Items (RI) section of the case file are copies of Barfield's complaint under INV# 01.

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 1
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 12/11/2020	Activity End Date:01/07/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:Case Opening Investigative Report

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**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
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On January 21, 2021 at approximately 10:00 AM, Special Agents (SA) Eric A. Kuusela and Brian Gregalot with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office conducted an interview with Michael Barfield. The interview took place at the Law Office of Robert Watrous, located at 1800 2nd Street, Suite 780, Sarasota, Florida.

During the interview, Barfield said he was self-employed as a paralegal consultant for the last 30 years. On or about November 20, 2020, he read a news article in one of the Bradenton news outlets that reported about the termination of Manatee County Administrator Cheri Coryea. After reading the news article, Barfield reviewed the November 19, 2020, Manatee County Board of County Commission (BCC) meeting online through the Manatee County website.

After reviewing the BCC meeting, Barfield filed several public record requests for electronic mail, texts, telephone logs and social media accounts for four (4) Manatee County Commissioners. The four (4) commissioners Barfield requested from were Commissioner James Satcher, Commissioner Kevin Van Ostenbridge, Commissioner George Kruse and Commissioner Vanessa Baugh.

Barfield said that Commissioner Kruse provided him with telephone logs on or about December 7, 2020.

On or about December 7, 2020, Barfield filed a civil lawsuit against Commissioners Satcher, Van Ostenbridge and Baugh to compel them to comply with the public records request.

Barfield provided SA Kuusela with a copy of his complaint that was presented to SA David Sarney on a previous date.

The complaint alleged that Manatee County Commissioner James Satcher, Commissioner Kevin Van Ostenbridge, Commissioner George Kruse and Commissioner Vanessa Baugh violated the Florida Sunshine Law between November 3, 2020 (2020 Election night), through November 19, 2020 (Manatee BCC special meeting).

An overview timeline from Barfield's complaint:

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 2
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 01/21/2021	Activity End Date:01/21/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description: Interview with Michael Barfield at his office in Sarasota, Florida

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- **October 28, 2020:** Commissioner Baugh emailed commission candidate Van Ostenbridge a copy of County Administrator Coryea's employment contract.
- **November 3, 2020:** Candidate's Satcher, Kruse and Van Ostenbridge became Commissioners Elect.
- **November 10, 2020:** Commissioner Whitmore publicly said that people do not want County Administrator Coryea in the position she currently holds.
- **November 10, 2020:** Commissioner Baugh was overheard talking to a Desoto County government employee regarding applying for a position in Manatee County government and informed that employee that a change was going to happen. It was alleged that Commissioner Baugh encouraged the Desoto County employee (Tara Poulton) to apply for the Manatee County Administrator position when it was open.
- **November 15, 2020:** Bradenton Times reported an article "Are Special Interests Gunning for County Administrator?"
- **November 15, 2020:** Commissioner-Elect Van Ostenbridge sent a text to Carlos Beruff (non-government employee) of a link to the Bradenton Times article with a text, "We have a leaker".
- **November 17, 2020:** Commissioner-Elect members were sworn in as Manatee County Commissioners.
- **November 17, 2020:** Commissioner Van Ostenbridge requested a "Special Meeting" regarding COVID-19 and possible future President Biden ordered lockdowns. The date of the meeting was set for November 19, 2020.
- **November 17, 2020:** Commissioner Van Ostenbridge sent a text message to Bob Spencer (non-government employee) "We have a special meeting on Thursday Carol took the bait".
- **November 19, 2020:** Commissioner Kruse sent a text message to Commissioner Satcher "Stick to original".
- **November 19, 2020:** Commissioner Van Ostenbridge met with County Administrator Coryea and asked for her resignation.
- **November 19, 2020:** At the special meeting, Commissioner Baugh motioned for Resolution R-20-191 to be voted on (passed 4/3) and Commissioner Van Ostenbridge motioned for a vote regarding the termination of County Administrator Coryea (passed 4/3).
- **December 10, 2020:** Barfield said that he spoke with Commissioner Servia who told him that she overheard Commissioner Baugh talking with an employee of Desoto County regarding a position opening in Manatee County.

In the complaint, Barfield pointed out several records of texts and or calls between the above-mentioned Manatee County Commissioners from October 28, 2020 through November 19, 2020.

The interview concluded at approximately 11:00 AM.

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On January 25, 2021, at approximately 1:00 PM, Special Agents (SA) Eric A. Kuusela and Brian Gregalot with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office conducted an interview with Manatee County Commissioner Carol Whitmore. The interview was conducted in Commissioner Whitmore's office at the County Administration Building, located at 1112 Manatee Avenue West, Suite 903, Bradenton, Florida 34205.

During the interview, Commissioner Whitmore stated that she has been a Manatee County Commissioner since 2006. Prior to becoming a County Commissioner, Commissioner Whitmore was a Holmes Beach City Commissioner and Holmes Beach Mayor.

Commissioner Whitmore serves as the at large commissioner in Manatee County.

SA Kuusela advised Commissioner Whitmore that the FDLE was conducting a preliminary criminal investigation regarding alleged sunshine law violation(s) by County Commissioners. Commissioner Whitmore advised she was familiar with the Florida Sunshine Law.

SA Kuusela asked Commissioner Whitmore about the events of a special meeting on November 19, 2020.

Commissioner Whitmore said that she and the other commissioners were sworn into office on November 17, 2020 at approximately 9:00 AM. Commissioner Whitmore advised that later in the evening, she was approached by Commissioner Kevin Van Ostenbridge who requested a special meeting regarding COVID-19 and possible presidential lockdowns. The meeting was scheduled for November 19, 2020.

Commissioner Whitmore said the special meeting that took place on November 19, 2020 went business as usual until Commissioner Vanessa Baugh presented a motion to have Resolution R-20-191 voted on.

Commissioner Whitmore advised that Commissioners Vanessa Baugh, George Kruse, James Satcher, and Kevin Van Ostenbridge all had a copy of the resolution proposed by Commissioner Baugh.

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 3
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 01/25/2021	Activity End Date:01/25/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:County Commissioner Carol Whitmore interview

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Commissioner Whitmore said that after the resolution vote, Commissioner Van Ostenbridge made a motion to terminate the County Administrator Cheri Coryea.

The vote was four (4) to three (3) to terminate Coryea as the Manatee County Administrator. Commissioner Whitmore said that she was surprised by Commissioner Van Ostenbridge's motion to terminate Administrator Coryea.

Commissioner Whitmore said that both the resolution by Commissioner Baugh and the motion by Commissioner Van Ostenbridge "looked like something fishy going on".

SA Kuusela asked Commissioner Whitmore if she had read any of the newspaper articles regarding the November county commission meeting. Commissioner Whitmore advised that she knew about the text message "she took the bait" purportedly made by Commissioner Van Ostenbridge. Commissioner Whitmore said the comment made by Commissioner Van Ostenbridge sounded preplanned and blatantly done.

Commissioner Whitmore said that on November 10, 2020, she attended a reception for departing commissioners where she overheard Commissioner Baugh talking to a Desoto County employee regarding a future county job opening in Manatee County government. Commissioner Whitmore said that she overheard Commissioner Baugh tell Tara Poulton (Desoto County employee) that there were a lot of changes coming and she should look around for positions opening. Commissioner Whitmore said Commissioner Servia was next to her and overheard Commissioner Baugh's comments to Poulton. Commissioner Servia rolled her eyes and laughed in disbelief of what she heard from Commissioner Baugh.

Commissioner Whitmore did not disclose any additional information regarding direct knowledge of violations of the sunshine law by other County Commissioners.

The interview concluded at approximately 1:55 PM. Also present during this interview was Assistant County Attorney (Manatee County) Pamela D'Agostino.

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On January 25, 2021, at approximately 2:00 PM, Special Agents (SA) Eric A. Kuusela and Brian Gregalot with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office conducted an interview with Manatee County Commissioner Misty Servia. The interview was conducted in Commissioner Servia's office at the County Administration Building, located at 1112 Manatee Avenue West, Suite 903, Bradenton, Florida 34205.

Commissioner Servia has been a Manatee County Commissioner since November of 2018. Servia served as the Vice Chairman of the Manatee County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) in 2019.

SA Kuusela informed Commissioner Servia that he was conducting a preliminary criminal investigation regarding alleged Florida Sunshine Law violations by a number of Manatee County Commissioners.

Commissioner Servia said she was familiar with the Florida Sunshine Law and has attended workshops provided by the county attorney regarding the Florida Sunshine Law.

Commissioner Servia said that there were a number of people both on the BCC and in the public sector that did not like the County Administrator, Cheri Coryea, as a professional.

SA Kuusela asked Commissioner Servia if she knew anything about the motion made by Commissioner Van Ostenbridge at the November 19, 2020, special meeting to terminate Administrator Coryea's employment contract. Commissioner Servia said that the special meeting was for concerns related to fears that President Biden was going to establish lockdowns because of COVID-19. Commissioner Servia had no prior knowledge of the motion by Commissioner Van Ostenbridge to terminate Administrator Coryea.

Commissioner Servia said that on November 10, 2020, during an event for outgoing commissioners, she overheard Commissioner Vanessa Baugh talking to Tara Poulton (Desoto County Economic Development & Community Services Division Director at DeSoto County Board of County Commissioners) near the cake table. Commissioner Servia said that Commissioner Baugh told Poulton that there was going to be an opening and a need for a new county administrator. Commissioner Baugh said Poulton should watch for the position.

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Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 01/25/2021	Activity End Date:01/25/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:County Commissioner Misty Servia interview

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Commissioner Servia said that she thought the conversation between Commissioner Baugh and Poulton was inappropriate.

Commissioner Servia said she had no other first-hand knowledge of any sunshine violations other than what she had read about in the newspapers.

Commissioner Servia said she had no knowledge of any BCC members in communication with each other regarding county business.

Commissioner Servia said that during the special meeting on November 19, 2020, she was very surprised of the timing and manner in which Commissioner Baugh motioned to pass Resolution R-20-191.

Commissioner Servia asked SA's Kuusela and Gregalot to leave her office so that she could confer with her attorney regarding additional information she had. SA's Kuusela and Gregalot left Commissioner Servia's office for approximately five (5) minutes.

SA's Kuusela and Gregalot returned to Commissioner Servia's office. Commissioner Servia said that during the afternoon of Thursday, January 21, 2021, she walked by Commissioner Van Ostenbridge's office and asked him how it was going. Commissioner Van Ostenbridge replied "it sucks". He then talked about legal fees and how Commissioner George Kruse would not talk to him because he and Commissioner Kruse had an agreement in which Commissioner Kruse changed his mind about the vote. Commissioner Servia said that after the conversation she left Commissioner Van Ostenbridge's office area.

The interview concluded at approximately 2:40 PM.

Also present during the interview was Commissioner Servia's attorney, Attorney Mark Barnaby and Assistant County Attorney Pamela D'Agostino.

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On February 1, 2021, at approximately 3:00 PM, Special Agents (SA) Eric A. Kuusela and Brian Gregalot with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office conducted an interview with Manatee County Commissioner Vanessa Baugh. The interview was conducted in Commissioner Baugh's office at the County Administration Building, located at 1112 Manatee Avenue West, Suite 903, Bradenton, Florida 34205.

Commissioner Baugh has served on the Manatee Board of County Commissioners (BCC) since November 2012. During her time on the BCC, Commissioner Baugh has served as the First Vice Chairman in 2015 and Chairman in 2016.

Commissioner Baugh said she has received several trainings regarding the Florida Sunshine Law over the past nine (9) years.

SA Kuusela asked Commissioner Baugh if she recalled sending then BCC Candidate Kevin Van Ostenbridge a copy of County Administrator Cheri Coryea's employment contract on or about October 28, 2020. Commissioner Baugh said that she did send it to him however she did not know why Candidate Van Ostenbridge wanted it.

Commissioner Baugh said that she did not have any conversations including email correspondence with any members of the BCC or BCC - Elect members regarding county business outside of the BCC meetings.

SA Kuusela asked if Commissioner Baugh recalled an event where she spoke to a Desoto County employee regarding employment in Manatee County during the evening of November 10, 2020. Commissioner Baugh said that she recalled the event and recalls talking with Tara Poulton who is the Economic Development & Community Services Division Director at the DeSoto County Board of County Commissioners. Commissioner Baugh said she knew Poulton lived and once worked in Manatee County and suggested she look for an opening on the Manatee County website if she ever wanted to return to Manatee County government. Commissioner Baugh said at no time did she suggest any specific position.

SA Kuusela asked Commissioner Baugh about the special meeting that took place on November 19, 2020. Commissioner Baugh said the meeting was about COVID 19 and possible

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 5
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 02/01/2021	Activity End Date:02/01/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:County Commissioner Vanessa Baugh Interview

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federal lockdowns. Commissioner Baugh knew of no other reason for the meeting.

SA Kuusela asked Commissioner Baugh about the resolution she presented during the special meeting that took place on November 19, 2020. Commissioner Baugh said that the Resolution, R-20-191, was introduced in order to have the ability to vote for a new chairman / chairwoman anytime. The former resolution only allowed for a vote for a new chairman / chairwoman during the 1st BCC meeting in the month of December. Resolution R-20-191 was an extension to Resolution R-20-065.

Commissioner Baugh said she did not have the original draft of Resolution R-20-191 in her possession.

Commissioner Baugh had no questions for SA Kuusela and the interview concluded at approximately 3:30 PM.

Also present during the interview via Webex was Attorney George Levesque with Gray Robinson Law Group, Tallahassee, FL.

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On February 5, 2021, at approximately 1:30 PM, Special Agents (SAs) Eric Kuusela and Brian Gregalot with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office (SFO) conducted an interview with Manatee County Board of County Commissioner George Kruse. The interview took place at Commissioner Kruse's office located inside the Manatee County Administration Building, ninth (9th) floor, 1112 Manatee Avenue West, Bradenton, Florida 34205.

Commissioner Kruse provided the following information:

Commissioner Kruse was elected to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) on November 3, 2020 and was sworn into office on November 17, 2020. Commissioner Kruse serves on the BCC as the First Vice Chair, at Large. This position is Commissioner Kruse's first public office.

Commissioner Kruse stated that he had a couple of ethics trainings regarding the sunshine law near the time he was elected as a BCC member.

Commissioner Kruse stated that he did not have any private discussions regarding county business with any other BCC member following his election on November 3, 2020. He further stated that he did not exchanged any calls, emails or text messages with any other BCC members regarding county business.

Commissioner Kruse stated that he was not in possession of any written communications to include texts or emails between himself and any other BCC member regarding county business following his election on November 3, 2020 and that he has not destroyed any communication between himself and any other BCC member regarding county business.

Commissioner Kruse stated he was not aware of Commissioner Van Ostenbridge plan to request a special meeting on November 19, 2020, until the day he requested the meeting from Commissioner Carol Whitmore. Commissioner Kruse said that believed the meeting was in regard to COVID-19 and the potential overreach of the federal government regarding COVID-19.

Commissioner Kruse said he was present at the November 19, 2020 special meeting. Commissioner Kruse said he was not aware of Commissioner Vanessa Baugh's resolution

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 6
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 02/05/2021	Activity End Date:02/05/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:Commissioner George Kruse Interview

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(Resolution-20-191) prior to the special meeting taking place and he did not have any prior discussions or communications with any of the BCC members regarding Resolution-20-191. He first became aware of the resolution sometime during the meeting when Commissioner Baugh handed each commissioner a copy of the resolution to review.

Commissioner Kruse said that he believed that the resolution would give the board the ability to immediately change policy rather than having to wait until another meeting to effect a change made by BCC members.

Commissioner Kruse stated that he did not privately discuss the removal of County Administrator Cheri Coryea with any other BCC member between the dates of November 3, 2020 and November 19, 2020.

Commissioner Kruse was questioned regarding phone records that showed several calls between himself and other BCC members between November 3, 2020 and November 19, 2020. Commissioner Kruse stated he did not discuss county business during any phone calls. Commissioner Kruse said that during those telephone calls with other BCC members he would ask about how he acquired items for his office, transition questions and other miscellaneous questions.

Commissioner Kruse stated he recalled sending a text message to Commissioner James Satcher on November 19, 2020, at 6:45 AM, that read, "ignore our call the other night. Stick to the original". Commissioner Kruse said that the text was in reference to what he and Commissioner Satcher were going to wear that day to the meeting. Commissioner Kruse said that Commissioner Kevin Van Ostenbridge was planning on wearing a tuxedo. The "original plan" was to wear jeans rather than a suit.

Commissioner Kruse had no additional information to provide to agents. Also present during the interview was Commissioner Kruse's attorney, Kristy Guy Zinna.

The interview concluded at approximately 2:15 PM.

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On February 5, 2021, at approximately 1:30 PM, Special Agents (SAs) Eric Kuusela and Brian Gregalot with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office (SFO) conducted an interview with Manatee County Administrator Cheri Coryea. The interview took place at Administrator Coryea's office located inside the Manatee County Administration Building, ninth (9th) floor, 1112 Manatee Avenue West, Bradenton, Florida 34205.

Administrator Coryea became the County Administrator in 2019. Prior to her current appointment, Administrator Coryea has served Manatee County as the Deputy Administrator and department director of several departments within county government.

During the interview, Administrator Coryea provided the following information:

Administrator Coryea said she did not have any first-hand knowledge of any Manatee County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) members violating the sunshine law. She speculated that some BCC members began to plan for her termination during a gathering prompted by Commissioner Vanessa Baugh on November 17, 2020 at the Riviera Dunes Dockside in Palmetto. Administrator Coryea said that several staff members told her that after the BCC meeting at the Bradenton Area Convention Center, several BCC members went over to the Riviera Dunes Dockside to have drinks. Administrator Coryea said she had no evidence of any illegal conduct by BCC members during the gathering.

Administrator Coryea stated that during the meeting with Commissioner Van Ostenbridge on November 19, 2020, he asked for her resignation. During the meeting, Administrator Coryea said she took detailed notes of the conversation. Administrator Coryea said that Commissioner Van Ostenbridge told her he had the votes to reconfigure the land deal (Lena Road land deal) that was passed on October 13, 2020 prior to the new commissioner's being sworn in on November 17, 2020.

Administrator Coryea provided SA Kuusela with copies of text messages obtained through a news media outlet. The copies are attached to this Investigative Report (IR) in the Related Items (RI) section under INV# 3.

The interview concluded at approximately 3:25 PM.

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 7
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 02/05/2021	Activity End Date:02/05/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:County Administrator Cheri Coryea Interview

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Also present at the interview was Administrator Coryea's attorney, Patrick Duggan.

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On February 8, 2021, at approximately 4:00 PM, Special Agents (SAs) Eric Kuusela and Brian Gregalot with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office (SFO) conducted an interview with Manatee County Commissioner James Satcher. The interview took place at attorney Robert Robinson's office located at 500 S. Washington Boulevard, Suite 400, Sarasota, Florida 34236. SA Kuusela swore Commissioner Satcher in prior to the interview beginning.

Commissioner Satcher was elected as a Manatee County Board of County Commissioner (BCC), representing District One, on November 3, 2020. Commissioner Satcher also leads a nonprofit ministry in Manatee County.

Commissioner Satcher provided the following information:

Commissioner Satcher stated he has not held public office before becoming a county commissioner. He said he was not familiar with the sunshine law and did not have any previous education regarding the sunshine law other than a recent email regarding the law.

Commissioner Satcher stated that he did not have any private discussions regarding county business with any other BCC member following his election on November 3, 2020.

Commissioner Satcher stated he did not exchange any calls, emails or text messages with any other BCC members regarding county business. He also said that he did not destroy any written communication to include texts or emails between himself and any BCC members regarding county business following his election win on November 3, 2020.

Commissioner Satcher stated that he was not aware of Commissioner Van Ostenbridge's request to have a special meeting on November 19, 2020 prior to the day Commissioner Van Ostenbridge requested the meeting from Commissioner Carol Whitmore on November 17, 2020. Commissioner Satcher said the special meeting was in regards to COVID-19.

Commissioner Satcher stated that Commissioner Vanessa Baugh's resolution (R-20-191) on November 19, 2020, "came out of left field". Commissioner Satcher stated he had no knowledge of the resolution until Commissioner Baugh passed out a copy of the resolution to each commissioner sometime during the meeting. Commissioner Satcher stated that he did not have

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 8
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 02/08/2021	Activity End Date:02/08/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:Commissioner James Satcher Interview

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any discussions or communications to include private meetings, call, text or emails with any BCC member regarding Commissioner Baugh proposed resolution.

Commissioner Satcher stated he did not discuss Commissioner Van Ostenbridge's motion to terminate County Administrator Cheri Coryea with any other BCC member between November 3, 2020 and November 19, 2020.

Commissioner Satcher said that he was unaware of Commissioner Van Ostenbridge's meeting with County Administrator Coryea to ask for her resignation.

Commissioner Satcher was questioned regarding phone records that showed several calls between himself and other BCC members between November 3, 2020 and November 19, 2020. Commissioner Satcher stated he did not discuss county business during any phone calls.

Commissioner Satcher stated he recalled receiving a text message from Commissioner George Kruse on November 19, 2020 at 6:45 AM that read, "Ignore our call the other night. Stick to the original". Commissioner Satcher stated he did not know what the text message was about and was asleep when the text message was sent to him. He said that after he woke up he saw the text he no idea what Commissioner Kruse was talking about.

Commissioner Satcher had no additional information to provide to agents.

Also present during the interview was Commissioner Satcher's attorney, Robert Robinson.

The interview concluded at approximately 4:50 PM.

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On February 8, 2021, at approximately 1:30 PM, Special Agents (SAs) Eric Kuusela and Brian Gregalot with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office (SFO) conducted a telephone interview with DeSoto County Economic Development & Tourism Director Tara Poulton. Poulton was referenced in several Investigative Reports (IR) in the case file regarding a conversation she had with Manatee County Commissioner Vanessa Baugh on November 10, 2020 during a social event in Manatee County, Florida.

Poulton currently serves as the DeSoto County Economic Development & Tourism Director and has had the position since 2017. Prior to working in DeSoto County government, Poulton worked for several years for the Southwest Florida Water Management District, responsible for Manatee, Sarasota, DeSoto and Charlotte Counties.

Poulton stated she attended an event on November 10, 2020, from approximately 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM, at the Bradenton Area Convention Center celebrating Priscilla Trace and Betsy Benac's service to Manatee County.

During the event, Poulton recalled talking with Manatee County Commissioner Baugh near the cake table. Poulton said that Commissioner Baugh asked her how things were going in DeSoto County. Commissioner Baugh then talked about her potentially returning to work in Manatee County and that a couple of positions should be opening soon. Poulton said Commissioner Baugh did not talk about any specific position that would be coming available within Manatee County government.

Poulton recalled during her conversation with Commissioner Baugh she noticed Commissioner Misty Servia standing nearby with a weird look on her face.

Poulton ended the conversation with Commissioner Baugh and did not think any more about the conversation until recently when a reporter contacted her and asked about the conversation she had with Commissioner Baugh.

Poulton said she did not know what positions Commissioner Baugh was referring to during the conversation and she has not spoken to Commissioner Baugh since the event on November 10, 2020.

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 9
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 02/08/2021	Activity End Date:02/08/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:Tara Poulton Telephone Interview

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Poulton had no additional information for agents.

The interview concluded at approximately 1:55 PM.

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INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

On February 11, 2021, at approximately 1:00 PM, Special Agents (SAs) Eric Kuusela and Brian Gregalot with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office (SFO) conducted an interview with Manatee County Commissioner Reggie Bellamy. The interview took place at Commissioner Bellamy's office located inside the Manatee County Administration Building, ninth (9th) floor, 1112 Manatee Avenue West, Bradenton, Florida 34205.

Commissioner Bellamy was elected to the Manatee County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) in 2018. Commissioner Bellamy currently serves the BCC as the District Two Commissioner.

During the interview Commissioner Bellamy stated that he did not have any first-hand knowledge of any Florida Sunshine Law violations conducted by any fellow BCC members.

Commissioner Bellamy stated that Resolution-20-191, created by Commissioner Vanessa Baugh was a total surprise to him. Commissioner Bellamy said he did not know the intent or the meaning of the resolution.

Commissioner Bellamy had no additional information to provide to agents.

Also attending the interview was Commissioner Bellamy's attorney, Chris Pratt.

The interview concluded at approximately 1:15 PM.

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 10
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 02/11/2021	Activity End Date:02/11/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:Commissioner Reggie Bellamy Interview

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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

On February 11, 2021, at approximately 10:27 AM, Special Agent (SA) Eric Kuusela with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office (SFO), requested four (4) separate Duces Tecum Witness Subpoena's from 12th Judicial Circuit Chief Assistant State Attorney Cynthia Evers.

The subpoenas were for Manatee County Board of County Commissioners: Vanessa Baugh, James Satcher, Kevin Van Ostenbridge and George Kruse.

At approximately 4:00 PM, SA Kuusela received the signed subpoenas from Chief Assistant State Attorney Evers via email.

Attached to this Investigative Report (IR) in the Related Items (RI) section of the case file are copies of the signed subpoenas for Manatee County Commissioners: Baugh, Satcher, Van Ostenbridge and Kruse under INV# 4.

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 11
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 02/11/2021	Activity End Date:02/11/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:Subpoena(s) Requested through the State Attorney's Office for the Twelfth Judicial Circuit.

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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

On February 16, 2021, at approximately 0830 hours, Special Agent (SA) Brian Kitchner with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Fort Myers Regional Operations Center, Sarasota Field Office, served subpoenas at the Manatee County Government Board of County Commissioners Office.

The subpoenas were received by County Commissioner Misty Martin Servia and signed for by Executive Administrative Assistant Vida Gordon. The subpoenas were for County Commissioners Vanessa Baugh, George Kruse, James Satcher, and Kevin Van Ostenbridge.

Copies of the signed served subpoenas will be maintained electronically in this case file as related item number 2.

There is no additional information to report at this time.

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 12
Author: Kitchner, Brian Harvey	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 02/16/2021	Activity End Date:02/16/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:Subpoenas Served at the Manatee County Government Board of County Commissioners Office.

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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

On February 18, 2021, at approximately 11:20 AM, Special Agent (SA) Eric Kuusela with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office (SFO) was contacted via telephone by attorney Sean P. Flynn who was representing Commissioner Kevin Van Ostenbridge regarding the alleged Florida Sunshine Law investigation.

SA Kuusela began requesting to interview Commissioner Van Ostenbridge on January 27, 2021. SA Kuusela and Flynn spoke on numerous occasions regarding an interview with Commissioner Van Ostenbridge

On February 18, 2021 at approximately 11:20 AM, Flynn contacted SA Kuusela via telephone and stated that he was advising his client not to be interview by FDLE regarding the Florida Sunshine Law investigation.

The telephone conversation concluded at approximately 11:25.

No additional information.

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 13
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 01/27/2021	Activity End Date:02/18/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:Commissioner Van Ostenbridge decision not to be interviewed by FDLE.

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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

On February 18, 2021, at approximately 0845 hours, Special Agent (SA) Brian Kitchner with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Fort Myers Regional Operations Center, Sarasota Field Office, re-served subpoenas at the Manatee County Government Board of County Commissioners Office.

Based on information received from Manatee County Assistant County Attorney Pamela Jill D'Agostino, it was determined to re-subpoena County Commissioners Vanessa Baugh, George Kruse, James Satcher, and Kevin Van Ostenbridge.

SA Kitchner personally served each commissioner their respective subpoena.

The initial serving of the subpoenas is documented in investigative report 12 of this case file.

Copies of the signed served subpoenas will be maintained electronically in this case file as related item number 3.

There is no additional information to report at this time.

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 14
Author: Kitchner, Brian Harvey	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 02/18/2021	Activity End Date:02/18/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:Subpoenas Re-served at the Manatee County Government Board of County Commissioners Office.

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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

On February 19, 2021, Special Agent Eric Kuusela with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office (SFO), rescinded four (4) subpoenas received by Commissioners James Satcher, Kevin Van Ostenbridge, Vanessa Baugh and George Kruse on February 18, 2021.

During a conversation with the State Attorney's Office, it was decided that that the subpoenas issued to Commissioners should be rescinded.

SA Kuusela informed the attorneys for all of the commissioners both verbally and via email that the subpoenas were rescinded.

Note: Emails were sent to all the attorneys of each respective commissioner on Monday, February 22, 2021.

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 15
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 02/19/2021	Activity End Date:02/22/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:Subpoenas rescinded on February 19, 2021.

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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

On March 12, 2021, Special Agent (SA) Eric Kuusela with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Fort Myers Regional Operations Center (FMROC), Sarasota Field Office (SFO) conducted a review of the case file.

During the review of the case file, the following information was summated:

On or about January 21, 2021, SA Kuusela obtained a complaint from Michael Barfield alleging that Manatee County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) James Satcher, Kevin Van Ostenbridge, George Kruse and Vanessa Baugh violated the Florida Sunshine Law between November 3, 2020 through November 19, 2020. SA Kuusela reviewed documents provided by Barfield which included telephone records and text messages purportedly from a telephones utilized by Manatee County Commissioners.

During the course of this inquiry, SA Kuusela conducted interviews with BCC members and witnesses between January 25, 2021 through February 11, 2021.

SA Kuusela requested and was granted subpoenas issued by the Twelfth Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office for cellular telephone records for BCC members Satcher, Van Ostenbridge, Kruse and Baugh. After learning that the cellular telephones used by the County Commissioners were personally owned devices and not Manatee County government issued telephones, SA Kuusela contacted the Twelfth Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office and a mutual decision was made to rescind the subpoenas issued to BCC members on February 18, 2021.

After the review of all of the information obtained during this preliminary inquiry, it has been determined that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that a criminal violation of the Florida Sunshine Law or any other Florida statute occurred. Therefore, this case will be closed.

Case Number: FM-73-1013	Serial #: 16
Author: Kuusela, Eric Arthur	Office: Sarasota
Activity Start Date: 03/12/2021	Activity End Date:03/12/2021
Approved By: Monk, Gregory Robert	

Description:Final review of the case file

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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

Case Related Items Print

Case #

FM-73-1013

Module

Investigative Report

<u>RI Seq #</u>	<u>Key 1 (Case</u>	<u>Key</u>	<u>Key 3</u>	<u>File Name</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Last Update Date</u>	<u>Last Update By</u>
INV-1	FM-73-1013	1		Complaint rec'd 121420 from MB.pdf	Complaint	01/27/2021 11:11:36	Kuusela, Eric Arthur
INV-2	FM-73-1013	12		Signed for Subpoenas.pdf	Signed for Subpoenas Served	02/16/2021 10:25:02	Kitchner, Brian Harvey
INV-3	FM-73-1013	7		Coryea Text copies.pdf	Text copies	02/16/2021 14:18:21	Kuusela, Eric Arthur
INV-4	FM-73-1013	11		Chief ASA Signed subpoenas BCC Baugh Satcher, Van Ostenbridge and Kruse.pdf	Chief ASA Signed Subpoenas for BCC Baugh, Satcher, Van Ostenbridge and Kruse	02/17/2021 09:39:06	Kuusela, Eric Arthur
INV-5	FM-73-1013	14		Signed for Subpoenas Served.pdf	Signed Served Subpoenas	02/18/2021 13:36:47	Kitchner, Brian Harvey