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THE STAR'S EDITORIALS

*Squabble over e-mails in the office of former Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt*

# An expensive end to a long and frustrating legal battle

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**M**issourians now know the cost of unprofessional conduct that plagued the governor's office during parts of Matt Blunt's tenure.

More than \$2 million. State Attorney General Chris Koster has announced the state will pay \$500,000 to settle a lawsuit brought by Scott Eckersley, who worked for a time as a lawyer in the governor's office.

The settlement comes after the state tallied more than \$1.3 million in legal expenses related to Eckersley's suit. And state taxpayers have paid an additional \$600,000 in a related legal action aimed at getting Blunt's office to release e-mail records.

The tortuous legal battle began in 2007 with a journalist pursuing a tip that Blunt's chief of staff at the time, Ed Martin, was inappropriately conducting political activities during work time.

Blunt's office refused the journalist's request for e-mail correspondence. Eckersley advised his superiors they were in violation of the Missouri Sunshine Law, and was fired soon afterward. He sued Blunt, Martin and three other staffers, alleging he was fired without cause and his character was maligned.

Under pressure from several fronts, Blunt finally made public the disputed e-mails. They were inconclusive about the reasons for Eckersley's firing. But they revealed a disturbing picture of a governor's office unwilling to separate politics from state business.

Martin had used his chief of staff post to contact outside groups for the pur-

pose of drumming up opposition to judicial candidates and the state's system of selecting judges. Other staffers waged a campaign to frame a judicial candidate as "out of the mainstream." Staffers spent an inordinate amount of time attempting to undercut Democrat Jay Nixon, the former attorney general who now is Missouri's governor.

Missourians deserve a governor's office that's focused on the well-being of the state and its citizens. Political and ideological agendas should be pursued elsewhere.

That is the lesson of the long and frustrating legal battle, which ended with all parties accepting a settlement. The shame is that taxpayers must foot the bill.



L.G. PATTERSON | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Former Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt**

