

Springfield
News Leader
Springfield, MO
Circ. 65973
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241-900
Altered document unexplained

No admission, apology
from Christian County
Commission officials.

wrong with this thing that the county clerk refused to file it and a notary felt compelled to mention the Wite-Out problem. The notary's note is right on the document's second page, in black and white.

No matter how bad Christian County officials might want you to forget about the document to the right, it is not going away.

Questions bubbled up so strongly that County Prosecutor Ron Cleek forwarded a complaint about this document to the state Attorney General's Office. He couldn't investigate it himself because he was representing the commissioners at the time.

It is etched, indelibly, into county record, and the county memory as well. It's a black mark created by Wite-Out.

The document, titled "Order of the Christian County Commission," has triggered complaints, an investigation and allegations of forgery.

It's obvious to Cleek and others in Christian County government that Barnett could not have signed this document on the date beside his name. He was not at work then; he was recovering from knee surgery and in physical therapy.



Grubaugh

No one is denying it was altered or falsely created. Still, after more than 2½ years, the tax-paying public has not been given answers as to how this happened, who did it and why no one has been taken to task for doing it.

So who created this document?
Why?
Was it forgery?

We hope, with an ongoing state audit of county business and practices, more will be revealed soon. If not, voters in the county must keep this memory strong — knowing an elected official, or more than one, tried very, very hard to pull a fast one and has neither admitted the shenanigans nor apologized.

Though no admissions have been made, Presiding Commissioner John Grubaugh is the public official who handed the document to County Clerk Kay Brown and tried to get her to attach it to the minutes of a county meeting.

One of the county commissioners whose signature appears on the document, Bill Barnett, insists he did not sign it. The date next to his name has broken lines, with obvious whited-out areas.

Grubaugh, Barnett and the third commissioner, Tom Huff, have been accused in documents and public statements of hiring a new county lawyer behind closed doors — in violation of the state Sunshine Law. Huff and Grubaugh have been accused of trying to use the false document to act as if the

There's also an inexplicable discrepancy in dates — Dec. 28, 2006 near the top of the document and Dec. 29 lower.

There's so much obviously



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OUR VOICE

This editorial is the view of
the News-Leader Editorial Board.

hiring were legal and done in
the open.

As to the forgery claim, the
state attorney general declined
to file criminal charges without
explaining specifically why, cit-
ing only insufficient evidence.

The attorney gen-
eral's office issued
a statement about
the matter only re-
cently, after being
pressed about the
forgery investiga-
tion by the media.

If new or strong-
er evidence surfaces, it's not
too late to file a charge; forgery
has a three-year statute of lim-
itations, which would expire
in this case in late January
2010.

A lawyer for Grubaugh and
his fellow commissioner Tom
Huff predicted back in early
2007 that a criminal charge
would not hold water, arguing
forgery cannot be proven with-
out an "intent to defraud." The
lawyer said this case stemmed
from politics or a conflict of
personalities.

Huff and Grubaugh have
made some admissions about
the county attorney's hiring. In
in a settlement document sev-
eral weeks ago, they acknowl-
edged violating the Sunshine
Law in doing the hiring.

But, as on other occasions
when their conduct has come

into question, they work hard
to spin their blatant disregard
for the law as innocent mis-
takes, trying to "aw shucks"
their way out of serious com-
plaints and costly misdeeds.

The settlement was arranged
by the attorney general's office,
which sued the county com-
missioners in early 2008. The
suit said commissioners failed
to adhere to the rules for open
meetings, minute-taking and
voting in public.

The settlement
did not, however,
address the altered
document. Al-
though well-
known Christian
County taxpayer
advocate Ernest

O'Gaffney complained about it
on many occasions, other
county officials questioned it
strongly and two officers from
the Missouri Highway Patrol
spent many hours investigated
how it came about, taxpayers
are left with no specific an-
swers.

Meanwhile, the two men who
had the most to gain by the al-
tering of the document simply
go about their business — your
business, actually, if you pay
taxes in Christian County.

There is hope, however.

Pesky and diligent auditors
from the state are poking
around the dark financial
nooks and crannies of the
county as this is being written.
It's possible they will unearth
more detail about this altered
county document. Maybe it
will finally get the attention it

truly deserves.

Just last week, the auditor's
office said it would be expand-
ing its work to look more
closely at the Christian Coun-
ty assessor's finances, in the
wake of federal fraud charges
against Assessor Sandra
Bryant-Littles.

We hope, with State Auditor
Susan Montee's reputation for
exposing Sunshine violations,
her staff will also find a way to
force to the surface as much in-
formation as can be obtained
about this flawed county "order."

O'Gaffney, who died before
he could learn of the
settlement, was sometimes ac-
cused of being too aggressive.
His critics, including Grubaugh
and Huff, tried to write him off
as fanatical.

We disagree.

Obviously he was angry, fo-
cused and willing to put his
own money toward filing
claims to force the commis-
sioners to follow the law.

Huff in 2008 won re-election
for four more years. Grubaugh,
who is up for re-election next
year, is expected to try to retain
his seat for another term.

O'Gaffney, if he were around,
would already be trying to put
a stop to that.

His supporters ought to re-
mind everyone they can of the
document reproduced on this
page. It certainly made a lasting
impression on us.

If you vote in Christian Coun-
ty, you should not forget it ei-
ther, no matter the spin and no
matter the months, even years,
that have passed.



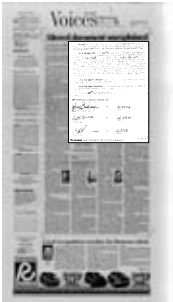
Huff



Barnett



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WHEREAS, the Christian County Commission believes that the appointment of a County Counselor to take over the responsibilities of providing counsel and representation in all civil law matters is vital and necessary for the operation of the county and all its departments and officers.

NOW THEREFORE, on this 28th day of December, 2006, at a duly called meeting of the Christian County Commission, after public notice, and in open session, upon Motion made by Commissioner Tom Huff, seconded by Commissioner Bill Barnett, and Presiding Commissioner Grubaugh voting in favor, the Christian County Commission did vote to appoint John W. Housley as the Christian County Counselor under the provisions of Section 56.631, RSMo, *et seq.* for the purpose of representing the County and all its departments, officers and agencies thereof in all matters of civil law including but not limited to furnishing written opinions for any county officer or department, reviewing and approving as to form contracts related to the business of the county, commencing, prosecuting and defending all civil suits or actions in which the county or a county officer or employee is a party, and the provision of legal advise and counsel on matters of civil law.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the County Counselor shall not be required to devote his full time to the duties of Christian County Counselor.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED this Order shall be filed in the office of the County Clerk of Christian County, Missouri before 5:00 p.m. this date.

Done this 29th day of December, 2006, at _____ .m.

THE CHRISTIAN COUNTY COMMISSION

John Grubaugh
 John Grubaugh
 Presiding Commissioner

Yes

12-29-06
 Dated

Bill Barnett
 Bill Barnett
 Commissioner

Yes

12-29-06
 Dated

Tom Huff
 Tom Huff
 Commissioner

Yes

12-29-06
 Dated

CHRISTIAN COUNTY

This document is part of the order hiring a Christian County counselor.