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STATE POLITICS

SBI to investigate possible vote buying in Lumberton election

By Colin Campbell

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JANUARY 26, 2016 04:55 PM, UPDATED JANUARY 27, 2016 05:01 PM



Incumbent Leon Mayor, right, won the Lumberton City Council Precinct 7 seat in November by one vote

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The State Bureau of Investigation is looking into accusations that a Lumberton City Council member paid people to vote for him.

After its own probe, the State Board of Elections voted this month to send its investigator's findings to the SBI and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of North Carolina.

Board spokeswoman Jackie Hyland confirmed the move but said she could not provide further details of the case.

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The initial complaint was filed by Laura Sampson, who is making her third

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state board to order a new election on primary day, March 15 – making Lumberton one of five towns that will hold do-overs of last year’s municipal elections.

Sampson said Maynor’s campaign paid voters, but she declined to provide details of what the payments were and who received them.

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“I don’t know that it was cash, but people were paid,” Sampson said Monday. “What we filed publicly was very vague, really because we knew that (the state board) would need to do their research and there would be an investigation.”

Maynor did not return multiple phone calls seeking comment.

Maynor’s attorney, Grady Hunt, said the claims are false. “Any allegations are just that – allegations – and at the appropriate time and the appropriate venue my client will defend himself against any allegations,” Hunt said Tuesday.

The situation mirrors Lumberton’s 2007 council election, when another near-tie between Sampson and Maynor resulted in a new election and accusations of election fraud.

That year, Maynor accused Sampson’s campaign of handing out \$5 vouchers for meals at a Huddle House restaurant, news reports said.

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After an investigation that lasted nearly two years, the Robeson County district attorney said he wouldn't charge Sampson. He said there were "signs of impropriety" in the campaign but not enough evidence of a crime, according to The Robesonian newspaper.

"Somehow it ends up this way," Sampson said when asked about the parallels between the 2007 and 2015 elections. "It's almost identical."

Sampson says the close division in the Ward 7 contest – where about 600 voters participated in November – reflects both the incumbent's longstanding support and the desire of many residents to see change. Maynor has been in office since 1995.

"There just hasn't been enough positive growth over the last 25 years," Sampson said. "If nothing else, it's a good challenge for the way things have always been done."

Robeson County has had other election fraud complaints in recent years. A 2009 Fairmont mayoral candidate was accused of voting twice, and the county's district attorney investigated after 30 ineligible voters cast ballots in the 2013 Pembroke municipal elections.

While this year's investigation continues and Maynor and Sampson gear up for the March 15 vote, Maynor is still serving on the City Council.

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BY COLIN CAMPBELL

OCTOBER 23, 2020 09:49 AM,

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