



M U L T I S T A T E

[Campaign finance panel to subpoena Rep. Glen Casada, former top aide in audit of PAC \(Tennessee\)](#)

Former House Speaker Glen Casada, his former aide Cade Cothren and several others will be subpoenaed as part of a reopened audit of a political action committee, state ethics and campaign finance officials decided Thursday.

Members of the Registry of Election Finance voted to reopen an audit of the Faith Family Freedom Fund PAC after the PAC's treasurer stated under oath that she opened the PAC at Cothren's request, but had no further involvement in its operations.

The registry voted to issue subpoenas for information related to the Faith Family Freedom Fund PAC to Cothren, Casada, and multiple others who may have knowledge of the PAC, including:

- Rep. Todd Warner, R-Chapel Hill
- Rep. Charlie Baum, R-Murfreesboro
- Former Rep. Rick Tillis, who Warner unseated in the August 2020 Republican primary
- Carol Simpson, Casada's longtime assistant

The Registry may issue additional subpoenas to other individuals in the future.

The subpoenas will include any and all records, correspondence and electronic communications of all kinds by and between the subpoenaed individuals. Members of the board emphasized the subpoenas do not indicate judgment and intend only to gather information.

The Faith Family Freedom Fund PAC reportedly paid for attack advertisements against Tillis, though it never disclosed any money raised or spent on campaign finance disclosures, NewsChannel 5 previously reported.

The subpoenas come as other investigations into the lawmakers continue.

In early 2021, FBI agents descended on the Cordell Hull legislative office building, in addition to visiting the homes of Casada, Warner, Cothren and other state lawmakers as part of a federal investigation.

The federal probe appears to be focused at least in part on campaign finances.

The Tennessean previously reported that three of the lawmakers who had their offices searched, including Casada, [spent tens of tens of thousands of campaign dollars with little-known companies](#).

Casada said in a text message Thursday that he is "in no way involved" with the Faith Family Freedom Fund PAC.

"I do not know why I am named as having any knowledge or involvement with this pac as I have none," he said.

Registry officials said Casada was being subpoenaed because he was Cothren 's former boss. The Williamson County lawmaker said he doesn't know how Cothren's employment on his staff is related to the PAC and the 2020 elections.

In a statement to The Tennessean on Thursday, Warner said, "Myself and my campaign do not have anything to do with that PAC.

Cothren and Baum did not return a message seeking comment.

Utah resident Sydney Friedopfer, who is listed as the Faith Family Freedom Fund PAC's treasurer, told the board under oath Thursday that she opened the PAC and agreed to be its treasurer at the end of 2019 or early 2020 at Cothren's request, without understanding how PACs function.

Friedopfer said Cothren assured her that "none of this was illegal."

After she signed her name to open the PAC, "that was the last I heard of it," Friedopfer said.

She said she was not aware of any expenditures, filings or disbursements until she began receiving phone calls from reporters several months later.

As treasurer of the PAC, Friedopfer is personally liable for any civil penalties assessed against the PAC, a fact she said she did not know when she opened it but is aware of now.

Friedopfer said she first heard from the Bureau of Campaign Finance when General Counsel Lauren Topping contacted Friedopfer about a month ago.

The bureau's executive director, Bill Young, said he at one point exchanged emails with someone claiming to be Friedopfer through an email connected to the Faith Family Freedom Fund PAC. Friedopfer said she had no knowledge of the email address' existence and had never accessed it.

The Registry intends to set a special meeting regarding the case in the future.

[State officials fine Nashville council member \\$360K for 36 campaign finance violations](#) (Nashville, TN)

Metro Council member Jonathan Hall is liable for \$360,000 in civil penalties for three dozen [campaign finance transgressions](#), state ethics and campaign finance officials decided Thursday.

Hall, who represents District 1, failed to file multiple mandatory financial reports on time — or at all — during election cycles in 2018 and 2019, according to a letter sent to Hall in December by Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance Executive Director Bill Young.

The letter lists 14 paragraphs of allegations against Hall, but Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance General Counsel Lauren Topping said Thursday that these allegations span 36 individual violations.

Of the financial reports Hall's campaign did file, some lack required donor and vendor information and itemized expenses. Some contain unexplained discrepancies deemed "troubling" by Assistant District Attorney General Brian Ewald, who conducted a preliminary investigation into the complaints last summer.

"I'm not the first person to be late or be behind on documents being filed," Hall said Thursday. "It's something that happens when you're going through this process and doing a lot of stuff. It happens. And that's why I said it's all about personal accountability, and I own that, 100%."

Expenditures listed on Hall's filed disclosure forms include \$6,972 in "bank/cash withdrawals" and \$4,160 for "Misc. Purchases." Neither of these entries is itemized or lists a vendor.

"He's been living out of this account like it's his personal checking account," registry member Tom Lawless said, referring to expenses listed on Hall's disclosure forms as "Southwest" and "Firestone," which combined total more than \$500.

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Neither Hall nor anyone representing Hall attended the Thursday morning hearing, where he would have had the opportunity to address the allegations against him.

Hall said he would have conversations with registry members about why he didn't attend Thursday's hearing, but he hasn't spoken with them previously and "can't comment on something they said that I've not heard."

Hall did attend a separate meeting of the Metro Board of Ethical Conduct Thursday afternoon, where board members set a hearing for Feb. 9. Hall said he will address specific expenditures in his rebuttal at that hearing.

He said he had not been in contact with any state officials but he did receive documents from the state prior to Thursday, though he could not say with certainty the exact date he received them. State officials say Hall failed to answer three letters requesting his response to the detailed allegations. Two of these letters were hand-delivered to the Metro Council office and Hall's home.

Hall said he did not attend the state hearing Thursday because he did not want to disturb the "sequence" of the processes to remedy the infractions on local and state levels.

"This process supersedes or precedes that one," he said. "It's just an overlap in the dates. We'll deal with this one and then we'll use the process that's still available to readdress that at the state level."

The registry voted to impose the maximum \$10,000 penalty for each infraction in part because Hall did not respond to state officials' repeated attempts to communicate with him.

"For me, it's the blatant disregard ... that calls for this," Chair Paige Burcham Dennis said of Hall's lack of response and the maximum penalty.

The registry could not impose penalties for an additional five missing campaign financial disclosure reports because the Davidson County Election Commission failed to issue assessment letters to Hall. Topping said the election commission is working to remedy its processes, noting that the commission's failure to issue assessment letters was "not limited to Mr. Hall."

Hall will not be eligible to run for public office again until the penalties are paid and the campaign finance documents in question are submitted and corrected, though Hall said he's not concerned that this will derail any future plans.

"That's just part of the process, and the time period between now and then is vast," he said.

[Cuomo Has \\$16 Million in Campaign Cash and No Campaign. What Now?](#) (New York)

Former Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York may have [resigned in disgrace last year](#) amid accusations of sexual harassment, but he still controls a war chest of more than \$16 million, according to records released on Tuesday.

Mr. Cuomo, once one of the [strongest fund-raisers](#) in the Democratic Party, left office last summer with [\\$18 million](#) in campaign funds. It was a staggering amount, especially for a departing official — though that sum has been surpassed by his successor, Gov. Kathy Hochul, whose team announced on Tuesday that her [campaign raised](#) nearly \$21.6 million in five months, with more than \$21 million in cash on hand.

The most recent disclosure report showed that Mr. Cuomo's stockpile had diminished since leaving office, as he made significant expenditures to law firms, reflecting the morass of legal difficulties he has confronted.

But with more than \$16.4 million in cash on hand, Mr. Cuomo remains among the best-funded political figures in New York.

Mr. Cuomo is not fund-raising as a candidate, but he has continued to communicate with supporters and to pay a few advisers — and he has also continued to take in some donations, in particular low-dollar donations, some of which came from outside New York. Some associates [have said](#) he appears interested in regaining relevance in public life, even as many big-spending onetime allies have cut ties.

High-dollar donations to Mr. Cuomo appeared to peter out by the end of July, shortly ahead of the release of findings in early August from an inquiry by the attorney general's office into Mr. Cuomo's conduct.

He reported more than \$200,000 in contributions and more than \$2 million in expenditures for the latest campaign finance period.

The release comes several weeks after top prosecutors in [Nassau](#), [Westchester](#) and [Albany Counties](#) declared the sexual harassment allegations against Mr. Cuomo to be disturbing, credible and serious, but concluded that they would not prosecute him for a crime. The prosecutors in [Nassau](#) and [Westchester](#) said allegations of Mr. Cuomo's conduct that they examined were not criminal under state law; the Albany County district attorney "concluded that we cannot meet our burden at trial," though the office found "the complainant in this case cooperative and credible."

Mr. Cuomo has plainly been emboldened by those developments.

Last week, Mr. Cuomo's lawyer, Rita Glavin, [held a news conference](#) in which she questioned the credibility of some of the women who accused Mr. Cuomo of misconduct, and laced into the state attorney general's office, which oversaw the investigation that concluded Mr. Cuomo sexually harassed 11 women.

Ms. Glavin declined to speculate on Mr. Cuomo's political future, [but said](#) he was exploring "whatever legal options he has available to him." Glavin PLLC, Ms. Glavin's firm, received nearly \$900,000, the report showed.

Under state law it is possible that the state could reimburse some legal fees, [Politico New York](#) has reported. Rich Azzopardi, a spokesman for Mr. Cuomo, said pursuing that avenue was an option, though it is not clear how such a move would be interpreted by the attorney general's office.

In addition to spending on legal fees, the campaign has spent on political efforts as recently as Tuesday morning, funding an email to supporters that sharply criticized Attorney General Letitia James and promoted Ms. Glavin's appearance. Ms. James and her team have strongly defended the report.

Campaign finance records also show at least \$42,500 in expenditures for Bulldog Strategies, LLC, which was founded by Mr. Azzopardi, and one of Mr. Cuomo's top advisers in office, Stephanie Benton, also appears to have remained on payroll.

There is also evidence of at least one plane charter: \$12,241.03 to Apollo Jets in mid-August. Mr. Azzopardi said it was for previous fund-raiser travel earlier that summer.

From political exile, Mr. Cuomo has remained in touch with associates and onetime allies after leaving office, sounding some of them out over the last several months about the political landscape, even as many Democrats [have made clear](#) they hope he stays on the sidelines. One Democrat familiar with some of Mr. Cuomo's calls said that he appeared to have started increasing his outreach in the New York political arena earlier this month, as a [judge dismissed a criminal complaint](#) that had accused him of groping a former aide in the Executive Mansion in late 2020.

Another person who spoke with him in recent weeks said Mr. Cuomo gave the impression that he was seeking vindication, and made clear that he believed those who had called for his resignation had made a mistake.

Mr. Cuomo could use his remaining funds beyond any effort to seek office himself, from making political donations — though accepting money from him would be politically fraught for many Democrats — to attacking perceived adversaries to efforts to improve his image.