



[Ethics Commission slaps two lobbyists with hefty financial penalties](#)

The Oklahoma Ethics Commission has slapped hefty penalties on two well-known lobbyists for violations of campaign finance rules.

James Milner has agreed to pay \$65,000 into the state's general revenue fund, while James McSpadden has agreed to pay \$50,000, both for violations related to the acceptance and expenditure of funds of Oklahomans for Healthy Living, a "straw political action committee."

Milner served as the group's chair, while McSpadden served as treasurer.

The Ethics Commission, Milner and McSpadden signed a settlement agreement to resolve the issue last week.

According to the Oklahoma Ethics Commission, Oklahomans for Healthy Living acted as a straw political action committee by accepting and distributing illegal corporate contributions, failing to disclose the contributions as required by the ethics laws, failing to identify that such contributions were from a corporate source, and expending corporate funds to Oklahoma committees.

"By failing to report the contributions received by OHL, neither the citizens of Oklahoma, nor recipient committees, had the ability to identify through publicly available reports that the source of OHL's funds were in fact corporate funds," according to the agency.

Milner agreed to pay \$65,000 to the state's general fund within 90 days, according to the settlement agreement. He also agreed never again to serve as an officer of a PAC.

McSpadden agreed to pay \$50,000 to the state's general fund within 90 days, according to the settlement agreement. He also agreed not to serve as an officer of a PAC for 10 years.

Both men agreed to notify any PACs for which they provide consulting services of the value of their services and of the PAC's need to report such services, according to the agreement.

Milner agreed to correct past reports, forfeit any remaining funds and dissolve Oklahomans for Healthy Living, according to the agreement.

McSpadden agreed to ensure, to the best of his ability and access to documents, that Oklahomans for Healthy Living's reports reflect actual activity of the PAC, according to the agreement.

"Mr. Milner is relieved to have this episode behind him and accepts the outcome," said Jonathan Buxton, his attorney. "The agreement signed last week is a painful but acceptable end to his cooperation with this investigation of the Ethics Commission."

McSpadden said in a statement released by his attorney that "I was asked to allow my name to be used as treasurer of a PAC without fully understanding what was expected of me. Significant errors were made that I now understand.

"I regret deeply that my lack of understanding of the responsibilities in the role lead to this outcome. I have accepted responsibility for my unintentional errors related to this matter and have learned a hard, but valuable lesson."

[Lobbyists reach agreement with ethics commission over secret trip to Atlanta](#)

A company co-owned by Mayor Lenny Curry's former chief administrator and the consultant who led both his election campaigns reached an agreement with the Jacksonville Ethics Commission in September [over a secret trip to Atlanta](#) that they organized and paid for that was attended by Curry, then-JEA CEO Aaron Zahn, and then-City Council President Scott Wilson.

City officials are prohibited from accepting gifts from registered lobbyists worth greater than \$100, but the ethics commission concluded that the value of the trip, which included airfare on a private jet and behind dug-out seats at an Atlanta Braves playoff game, was \$786.

The company, Conventus, LCC, and its co-owners, Sam Mousa and Tim Baker, did not admit any wrongdoing as part of the agreement. However, the commission concluded the trip was worth more than the \$400 that the company's co-founders, Tim Baker and Sam Mousa, told some of the participants to reimburse the company in order to not cross the \$100 gift threshold.

Wilson and Brian Hughes, Curry's chief administrator who also attended the trip, paid Conventus an additional \$350, and Conventus agreed to donate \$1,400 to a local charity created to help residents and businesses effected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In return, the ethics commission agreed to not initiate a complaint into the matter.

Although the agreement is available on the ethic's office website, the commission never announced that it reached an agreement with Conventus, LLC. However, it was mentioned in [an investigative report on the privatization of JEA](#) that was released Monday by a special Jacksonville City Council committee.

Ethics commission chair Ellen Schmitt said the agreement was the result of months of deliberations that occurred in seven meetings from January 2020 to September. All of those meetings were closed to the public, as state and local ethics investigations are confidential until they are completed.

Schmitt declined to say why the commission agreed to settle and didn't initiate a complaint. The Times-Union has requested recordings of the meetings, which are now public.

Schmitt said Curry and Zahn weren't required to pay any additional money because they had already adequately reimbursed Conventus.

Curry initially paid for the travel expenses by directing Conventus to make an in-kind contribution worth \$400 to an obscure political committee that had no official connections to him. Curry justified using the political committee to pay for the expense because he said he discussed political fundraising with Baker.

The committee's financial disclosures didn't contain any information that would have connected the donation to Curry's travel.

Months later, Curry personally paid Conventus an additional \$400 after Wilson expressed concerns about the trip.

Baker and Mousa told the commission Zahn reimbursed their company \$700 for the trip.

At the time of the September 2019 trip, the owners of the company, Tim Baker and Sam Mousa, had both been involved in the active effort to sell JEA.

Mousa, who retired from City Hall in July 2019, was a paid consultant for Florida Power and Light, whose parent company NextEra was bidding on JEA.

Zahn, Curry, Wilson and Hughes were prohibited from discussing the sale with any representatives of any companies trying to purchase JEA, and everyone who attended the trip said those rules were followed.

Baker has said he stopped working for FPL in July 2019, although NextEra listed another company he owned as a list of consultants it hired to help them purchase JEA in response to a subpoena it received from a special Jacksonville City Council examining the privatization effort.