

The 2023 Mock Trial Case



IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF FONDREN COUNTY STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

Alex Green,

Plaintiff,

v.

Eastover Ledger,

Defendant.

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CIVIL ACTION NO: 2023-MT

NOTE: All characters, names, events, places and circumstances in this mock trial case are fictitious or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to any person (living or dead), place, thing or event is purely coincidental.

The 2023 Mississippi High School Mock Trial case, *Alex Green v. Eastover Ledger*, has been adapted from the 2018-2019 Minnesota High School Mock Trial case, *Hayden Brooks v. Cahill Monitor*. The Mississippi High School Mock Trial Committee would like to thank Minnesota for making its case available.

INTRODUCTION

*This introduction is of **no legal consequence** in terms of the trial and is **not admissible** for impeachment purposes or for any other purpose.*

This case takes place in Eastover, a small town in Fondren County, Mississippi. On September 22, 2021, the Eastover Ledger, the town's paper, printed an article that accused retired County Commissioner Alex Green of taking a bribe in connection with the routing of a pipeline through Eastover. The article claimed that Commissioner Green took half a million dollars in exchange for voting in favor of the proposal to move the placement of a planned pipeline – a proposal supported by Jess Ramsey, a prominent local businessperson. The article alleged that Commissioner Green agreed to this bribe but was unable to act on it because the Fondren County Board of Commissioners' vote was postponed until after Green's retirement due to a blizzard at the end of December 2020. According to this article, Commissioner Green kept the money anyway.

As a result of the article, Green has lost a number of lucrative speaking engagements and other business opportunities. In addition, his/her reputation within the Eastover community has been damaged. As a result, Green has filed suit against the Eastover Ledger for defamation of character, alleging that the story was completely false.

STIPULATIONS

1. All exhibits included in the problem are authentic and accurate in all respects, and no objections to the authenticity of the exhibits shall be entertained.
2. Stipulations cannot be contradicted or challenged.
3. There are **NO** costume options permitted as an exception to Rule 18(b) this season.
4. The Charge of the Court is accurate in all respects; no objections to the charge shall be entertained.
5. All statements taken from or given by witnesses are properly signed and sworn or affirmed under oath on the dates indicated at the places indicated. All statements were constitutionally obtained.
6. The **Introduction** provided is **of no legal consequence** in terms of the trial and **is not admissible** for impeachment purposes or for any other purpose.
7. A severe blizzard occurred in Fondren County on December 19, 2020. As a result of the blizzard, the meeting of the Fondren County Board of Commissioners scheduled for December 19, 2020, was cancelled. The next meeting of the Fondren Board of Commissioners was held on January 9, 2021.
8. Exhibit 2 is a record that complies with the requirements of Rule of Evidence 803.6, the hearsay exception for records of regularly conducted activity. No additional foundation is required to establish that Exhibit 2 is admissible under Rule 803.6.
9. On October 30, 2020, PRT News, a Pearl River television news station, recorded a speech given by Plaintiff Alex Green at a conference in the town of Pearl River, Mississippi. The speech started at 6:00 p.m. and ended at 7:30 p.m. On November 2, 2020, PRT News made the video of the speech available

on their website with the title, “Green, MS Icon, Turns State Conference into Rousing Memorial to Public Service.”

10. Alex Green reported gambling earnings from a foreign country, in the amount of \$523,046.85, to the Mississippi Ethics Commission on October 17, 2020.
11. The actions of Stevie Downing and Sam Diggins related to their reporting, writing, and publishing of Exhibit 1 were within the scope of their employment.

WITNESSES

The following witnesses are available to be called by the parties. Plaintiff’s witnesses may not testify or be called on behalf of the Defendant. Defendant’s witnesses may not testify or be called on behalf of the Prosecution. See Rules 3, 5 and 12(f) for more details on witnesses.

For the Plaintiff

Alex Green
Sidney Freeman
Morgan Reeves

For the Defense

Jess Ramsey
Stevie Downing
Sam Winfrey

EXHIBITS

Teams in competition may use the following exhibits. Teams should only print and use exhibits in a black and white (grayscale) format; some exhibits are presented in the case materials in color to give teams a better view of the exhibit. They are pre-marked and are to be referred to by the assigned number, as follows:

Exhibit Numbers and Title/Descriptions

Exhibit 1:	Eastover Ledger Article
Exhibit 2:	Eastover Inn Receipt
Exhibit 3:	Ethics Commission Letter
Exhibit 4:	Code of Ethics
Exhibit 5:	Eastover Ledger – Green’s Retirement Announcement
Exhibit 6:	Curriculum Vitae – Dr. Morgan Reeves
Exhibit 7:	Letter of Recommendation for Sidney Freeman

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF FONDREN COUNTY
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI**

ALEX GREEN,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	CIVIL ACTION NO: 2023-MT
)	
EASTOVER LEDGER,)	
)	
Defendant.)	

COMPLAINT

COMES NOW Alex Green, Plaintiff in the above-styled action, and files this Complaint against Defendant Eastover Ledger showing the Court as follows:

PARTIES, JURISDICTION, AND VENUE

1.

Plaintiff Alex Green ("Green") is an adult resident of the Fondren County, Mississippi.

2.

Defendant Eastover Ledger is a Mississippi newspaper headquartered and published in Fondren County, Mississippi.

3.

Venue is proper in this Fondren County pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 11-11-3, because Fondren County is Eastover Ledger's principal place of business, and it is where a substantial event that caused the injury occurred.

4.

This court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 9-7-81.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

5.

Green is a former Fondren County Commissioner and is a well-respected member of the City of Eastover and the County of Fondren.

6.

The Eastover Ledger is the daily newspaper in general circulation in the City of Eastover, Mississippi and in Fondren County.

7.

On September 22, 2021, the Eastover Ledger published an article entitled "A Dishonest Thief: Retired County Commissioner Accused of Taking Bribe to Change Pipeline Location" (the "Article"). A copy of the Article is attached as Exhibit 1.

8.

The Article claimed that Green, while serving as a Fondren County Commissioner, accepted a bribe of five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000.00) from an individual named Jess Ramsey ("Ramsey") in exchange for agreeing to vote for a proposal changing the future placement of a pipeline that Ramsey needed to increase community engagement.

9.

The statements made in the Article and described above were false.

10.

The Article was read by the public. In addition, on September 23, 2021, the Article was published by the Choctaw Tribune and the Reservoir Press.

**COUNT 1
DEFAMATION**

11.

The statements made by the Eastover Ledger in the Article about Plaintiff were false and defamatory.

12.

In publishing the Article and making the defamatory statements, the Eastover Ledger acted with knowledge that the statements were false or with reckless disregard for whether the statements were true or false at the time when the defendant had serious doubts about whether the statements were true.

13.

The statements made by the Eastover Ledger were published and read by the public. The statements deprived Plaintiff of public confidence and damaged Plaintiff's reputation.

14.

As a direct and proximate result of the Article, Plaintiff suffered damages as a result of loss of reputation, public confidence, and standing in the community, loss of paid speaking engagements, loss of a contract to publish a book on public official responsibility, and loss of a development deal with PTV.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays for the following relief:

- (a) That process issue and Defendant be served with a copy of this Complaint;
- (b) That Plaintiff have a trial by jury on all issues;
- (c) That Plaintiff be awarded special and general damages in an amount to be proven at trial and as determined by a fair and impartial jury;
- (d) That Plaintiff be awarded costs and attorney's fees in bringing this action; and
- (e) That Plaintiff be awarded such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper under the circumstances.

This, the 20th day of August, 2022.

Patrick Tolliver

By: 
Tolliver Pointe, LLC
Attorneys for Plaintiff

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF FONDREN COUNTY
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI**

Alex Green,

Plaintiff,

V.

Eastover Ledger

Defendant.

CIVIL ACTION NO: 2023-MT

ANSWER

COMES NOW Eastover Ledger, Defendant in the above-styled action, and files this Answer showing the Court as follows:

1.

The allegations of Paragraph 1 are admitted.

2.

The allegations of Paragraph 2 are admitted.

3.

The allegations of Paragraph 3 are admitted.

4.

The allegations of Paragraph 4 are denied.

5.

Regarding paragraph 5 of Plaintiff's Complaint, Defendant admits that Green was a former Fondren County Commissioner but denies the remaining allegations in that paragraph.

6.

The allegations are admitted.

7.

The allegations are admitted. Defendant admits that Exhibit 1 to Plaintiff's Complaint is a copy of the Article published by Defendant on September 22, 2021.

8.

The allegation of Paragraph 8 are admitted.

9.

The allegations of Paragraph 9 are denied.

10.

The allegations of Paragraph 10 are admitted.

11.

The allegations of Paragraph 11 are denied.

12.

The allegations of Paragraph 12 are denied.

13.

The allegations of Paragraph 13 are denied.

14.

The allegations of Paragraph 14 are denied.

WHEREFORE, Defendant prays for the following relief:

- (a) That Defendant have a trial by jury on all issues;
- (b) That Plaintiff's complaint be dismissed;
- (c) That Defendant be awarded costs and attorney's fees in bringing this action; and
- (d) That Defendant be awarded such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper under the circumstances.

This, the 18th day of September, 2022.

Eggleston Law, P.C.

By: S. Eggleston
Attorney for Defendant

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF FONDREN COUNTY
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI**

ALEX GREEN,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	CIVIL ACTION NO: 2023-MT
)	
EASTOVER LEDGER)	
)	
Defendant.)	

PRE-TRIAL ORDER

At a hearing held December 4, 2022, the Court heard arguments on three issues presented by the parties. The first was a motion for partial summary judgment by Defendant Eastover Ledger. The second was a motion by Defendant to admit statements made to Stevie Downing, an employee of Defendant and the reporter who authored the article in question. The third was a motion filed jointly by the parties to bifurcate the issues of liability and damages. For the reasons set forth below, the Court grants all three motions.

I. Defendant's Motion for Partial Summary Judgment Regarding Plaintiff's Status as a Public Figure.

Defendant Eastover Ledger made a motion for partial summary judgment. The question presented by Defendant's motion is whether, as a matter of law, Plaintiff Alex Green qualifies as a public figure for purposes of this trial. For the reasons set forth in this order, the Court finds that Plaintiff is a public figure as a matter of law. As a result, Defendant's motion for partial summary judgment is granted.

Under Mississippi law, the elements of a defamation claim are: (1) The statement or communication at issue must be defamatory; (2) The statement or communication must be false; (3) The statement or communication must refer to the plaintiff; and (4) The statement or communication must be "published," meaning that it must be communicated to someone other than the plaintiff. *See Fulton v. Miss. Pub. Co.*, 498 So. 2d 1215, 1216 (Miss. 1986).

But when the plaintiff is a "public figure," s/he must do more than establish the four elements listed above. For a public figure, proof of actual malice is also required to establish liability. *See New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254, 279-80 (1964). Actual malice means that the defendant knew the statements were false or made the statements with reckless disregard as to whether they were true or false. *Id.*

A "vortex public figure" is one "who is otherwise a private figure but who thrusts himself or becomes thrust into the vortex of a matter of legitimate public interest." *Ferguson v. Watkins*, 448 So. 2d 271, 277-78 (Miss. 1984) (quoting *Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc.*, 418 U.S. 323, 345 (1974)).

The facts presented by the parties demonstrate beyond dispute that Green qualifies as a vortex public figure. Green occupied a position of prominence during his/her twenty-three years as a County Commissioner. Green thrust her/him into the public eye when Green initially ran for commissioner and during the many campaigns in which Green sought reelection. Not only was the Commissioner's position influential, but s/he is also well-known throughout Eastover for her/his previous employment as the Eastover City Attorney. In that position, Green provided legal advice to the city and was prominent in crucial policy and political discussions in the city. Given these circumstances, the Court concludes as a matter of law that Green is a vortex public figure.

Because the Court is granting Defendant's motion for partial summary judgment, Plaintiff may not argue at trial that s/her is a private figure or any type of public figure other than a general public figure. This order represents the final decision on this issue, and the jury will be instructed at trial that Plaintiff is a general public figure.

Accordingly, in addition to the four elements of defamation set forth above, Plaintiff must also prove that Defendant acted with actual malice. Put another way, Green must demonstrate that the Eastover Ledger published the Article with knowledge that statements contained therein were false or with reckless disregard as to whether they were false.

II. Joint Motion to Admit Out-of-Court Statements.

Several witnesses in this trial will testify to conversations they had with others during the course of law enforcement and/or reporting work. Namely, Agent Sidney Freeman, reporter Stevie Downing, and editor Sam Winfrey, all had conversations with multiple people in investigating this case. Defendant and Plaintiff both argue that these statements are not hearsay, and this Court agrees.

Hearsay is defined by Rule of Evidence 801(c) as "a statement, other than one made by the declarant while testifying at the trial or hearing, offered in evidence to prove the truth of the matter asserted." Put another way, a statement is hearsay if the statement is being used to show that the statement is true. If the statement is being used for some other reason, it is not hearsay.

The statements made by people to whom these witnesses spoke during the course of conducting their affairs are relevant even if they are not true. The fact that a witness talks to someone may vindicate their conduct or otherwise show that a witness acted properly.

For example, Eastover Ledger staff need to be able to explain what they were told by others as they investigated a possible story to show whether they acted with reckless disregard for the truth. A reporter who gets information that appears credible might not act with reckless disregard for the truth, even if the information the reporter obtains turns out to be false. Of course, reckless disregard is ultimately a question for the jury to decide.

Meanwhile, Agent Freeman of the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension has been offered by the Plaintiff to prove, in part, that there was avenues of investigation the Eastover Ledger could have looked into but did not. Freeman would testify to multiple interviews of witnesses and reviewing of documents that the Eastover Ledger may have neglected to investigate before publishing their story. This, the Plaintiff argues, serves as evidence of reckless disregard for the truth by the Defendant, even if the claims made to Christoff in these interviews are not true.

These statements are admissible, but they are admissible only for a limited purpose. If a witness testifies that a third party made a statement to that witness, that statement is only evidence that it was made, not that it was true. Attorneys making closing arguments in this trial should be particularly aware of this limitation. It is improper to argue that the statements made to Freeman, Downing, and Winfrey were true, unless the statements are admissible under an exception to the hearsay rule or the substance of the statements is proven with other admissible evidence.

III. Joint Motion to Bifurcate Trial.

The parties requested in a joint motion that the issues of liability and damages be bifurcated. This Court agrees. As a result, the Court hereby orders that the trial will litigate only liability. If a jury finds Defendant defamed Plaintiff, the amount of damages to be awarded to Plaintiff will be determined at a future trial.

DATED: December 15, 2022

/s/ Judge B. O'Neil
Circuit Court Judge

STATEMENT OF ALEX GREEN

1 My name is Alex Green. I am sixty-six years old and I reside in Eastover, Mississippi in Fondren County. I am a
2 retired County Commissioner here in Fondren County, Mississippi. I received a Master's Degree in Public Policy
3 from the University of Southern Mississippi and went on to law school at Mississippi College where I finished
4 near the top of my class. My community service career started when I was twenty-eight years old, taking a job
5 with the Office of the Eastover City Attorney. I worked in the City Attorney's Office for 15 years, and during that
6 time I became familiar with all of the local attorneys, police officers, city council members, and county
7 commissioners. After working as an Assistant City Attorney for ten years, the Eastover City Council appointed
8 me the Eastover City Attorney. When I was forty-three, after serving as the City Attorney for five years, I was
9 elected to the position of County Commissioner of Fondren County. Of course, after being elected to the county
10 board, I resigned my position as Eastover City Attorney. I served the people of Fondren County as a County
11 Commissioner for the last twenty-three years of my career. For the last five years I was the Chairperson (or
12 President) of the Commission. I also serve on a number of boards of directors, including the board of my church
13 and the local chamber of commerce. I have been very active in the Eastover Charitable Foundation and have
14 helped organize the Red Cross blood drive each of the last sixteen years. In 2012 I received the Winter Award
15 for Service to the Community given out by the Society of the Sons and Daughters of Fondren County. I stepped
16 down from the County Board at the end of 2020 because I decided it was time to enjoy my golden years with
17 my spouse.

18
19 I spent years serving my community and my state, and I never imagined that someone as sinister and evil as
20 Stevie Downing and that criminal Jess Ramsey would come along and ruin everything that I worked for. I have
21 given my entire life to the people of Fondren County, only to have that donation repaid by being dragged through
22 the mud. I never engaged in any illegal activity, and I certainly did not accept a bribe of any kind from Jess
23 Ramsey.

24
25 In the spirit of full disclosure, I have known Ramsey for a number of years. In fact, anybody who is anybody
26 around Fondren County knows Ramsey. For many years s/he was the richest person in Fondren County and was
27 invited to all the parties thrown by community leaders. I played in a few poker games with Ramsey as well, but
28 they were always just for fun. There was never any money on the line. We just played so one of us could brag
29 that they were the best poker player in town.

30
31 I remember the day that the pipeline issue came before the County Commissioners. Noble Norwegian Oil
32 Syndicate (NNOS) made an application to the Board to build an oil pipeline that would run through the Reservoir
33 Corridor in Fondren. Higher levels of government had already approved the pipeline being built and going
34 through Fondren County. The only say Fondren County had in the construction of the pipeline was where it
35 would be built – the Reservoir Corridor or somewhere else.

36
37 Ramsey was vehemently against NNOS's proposal to build the pipeline in the Reservoir Corridor and testified
38 before the County Board on several occasions. It may be that s/he saw the pipeline as decreasing the value of
39 some of her/his many properties, or maybe, as the rumors go, Ramsey was planning on putting up some high-
40 priced private homes. Maybe Ramsey was concerned that the pipeline jobs would pay more than s/he pays
41 her/his employees, which could then reveal that Ramsey had stolen her/his employees' pension money. The
42 story of how Ramsey had stolen all of her/his employees' money had been in the news for some time; it came

43 as no surprise to anyone that Ramsey was convicted and sent to the Mississippi Federal Correctional Institution
44 for the crimes.
45

46 It was merely chance that the pipeline issue came before the County Board of Commissioners in March of 2020.
47 It was also simply a coincidence that Ramsey hired a former County Board Accounting Specialist, my next-door
48 neighbor, Joe Weaving, to serve as her/his accountant. I have known Joe well for a number of years and he has
49 appeared before the County Board – as employee and as outside accounting advisor – for a number of years.
50

51 Even though I knew Ramsey I decided not to recuse myself from voting on the pipeline issue. Somebody had to
52 make sure that the best interests of the residents of Fondren County and the State of Mississippi were looked
53 after. I saw the case as a great career opportunity for me – being the senior County Commissioner leading the
54 County Board on an issue of county, state, and even national and international importance. It would be like the
55 building of America’s railroad system all over again. I was sure the issue would get plenty of press, and
56 afterwards I thought maybe I could go on a speaking tour about the issue and the building of the pipeline, maybe
57 even write a book about it – who knows, but the opportunities were endless.
58

59 I had been considering retirement for a long time, and I made up my mind to not run again for County
60 Commissioner after the pipeline issue was first put before the County Board. I knew this one, last, high-profile
61 issue would be long, involve reading a lot of technical reports and listening to a lot of political and emotional
62 testimony. I also knew it would create a lot of tension in the community. I knew the matter would take a lot
63 out of me and that I wouldn’t want to work anymore. However, I decided not to announce my retirement right
64 away. Instead, I announced my retirement near the end of the year in order to ensure the focus of the County
65 Commissioners was on the pipeline issue and not on me. I was also somewhat concerned that the vote on the
66 pipeline would be delayed until after my retirement if I announced my retirement too early. As I recall, I issued
67 a press release announcing my retirement on November 2, 2020, while I was attending the State’s County
68 Commissioners’ conference.
69

70 I know Ramsey claims that Weaving had a secret meeting in the middle of the night where I allegedly agreed to
71 vote against placing the pipeline through the Reservoir Corridor. That couldn’t be farther from the truth.
72 Ramsey apparently said that this secret meeting happened the night before Halloween, but that just couldn’t be
73 possible – that whole week I was at the County Commissioners’ conference in Jackson. In fact, on October 30,
74 2020, I gave the keynote dinner speech on the ethical responsibilities of county commissioners at 6:00 p.m. You
75 can check out my speech on my website! The speech lasted about ninety minutes, and afterward I had partied
76 with colleagues. There were a ton of people at the meeting and for the life of me I cannot remember exactly
77 who I was with. There are so many commissioners at that event it is hard to keep track of all of them. All I know
78 is that I ended up back at my room at the Eastover Inn that evening – to assert that I drove all the way from
79 Jackson to Littletown just to meet Ramsey is ridiculous – it’s a 3-hour drive!
80

81 I relished the fact that the last issue that would come before a vote of “my” County Board was going to be the
82 pipeline issue. Everyone knew Ramsey did some terrible things to her/his employees. Voting for the pipeline
83 would be my small way of punishing Ramsey. The final hearing and vote were scheduled for the third week in
84 December. The week before the vote, the County Board heard a final round of testimony from supporters and
85 opponents of the pipeline. This much is true – I did allow more opponents to present arguments against the
86 pipeline and allowed Ramsey to testify more times than any other person. Contrary to what Ramsey claims, my

87 rulings weren't based on any secret agreement. I just wanted to be sure there was no chance that Ramsey would
88 win if s/he turned around and sued the County Board of Commissioners.

89
90 When a massive blizzard hit Eastover, the County Commissioners' offices shut down for a week. The last votes
91 of the year were supposed to take place on December 19, but once the County Board's last meeting of the year
92 was delayed, no further County Board meetings were held until the next year. This upset me deeply and
93 profoundly because I had invested a lot of time, energy, and taxpayer funds in learning everything I could about
94 the pipeline and its potential impact on Fondren County and the community. I wrote the Mississippi Supreme
95 Court and every member of the Fondren County Board of Commissioners a letter requesting permission to
96 remain as a Special Commissioner to vote on the pipeline issue even after my retirement. Alas, it was simply not
97 meant to be because County Commissioner was an elected position. The answer was a resounding "no."

98
99 After my retirement began everything was terrific. I had booked a number of lucrative speaking engagements
100 around the country, I was also in negotiations with Random House to get my first book on county commissioners'
101 ethical responsibilities published, and I was even in line for a lucrative gig on PTV. But everything came to a
102 screeching halt in September 2021 when Downing's article hit the papers. Every word of that article is a lie, but
103 shortly after it was published in the Eastover Ledger it was picked up by other major newspapers and became a
104 big story. Everyone thought I was corrupt and all of my speaking engagements were cancelled. My book deal
105 fell through. PTV called to say they weren't interested anymore. My reputation in the community is ruined – I
106 don't even feel comfortable going out in public anymore. My spouse became terribly depressed because of all
107 of the terrible things that were said about me in the press. Everything was a disaster, just dreadful. Now I am
108 stuck paying huge legal fees when this was supposed to be the time when I could finally cash in on everything I
109 had done in my career. Ramsey defrauded her/his creditors and has (their!) money to burn – this was my chance
110 to finally see the benefit of all my years of public service.

111
112 The head prosecutor of Fondren County is an old and dear friend of mine, Tim Stokes, and he assured everyone
113 that they would do a thorough investigation before any charges were filed. In fact, they even contacted the
114 Mississippi Attorney General's Office to have a Special Agent from the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension review
115 the matter. Of course s/he found that Ramsey's story was simply not true. Yes, I am very close with the local
116 and county law enforcement officers and attorneys who investigated my case and I know the State's Attorney
117 General. But I also know that none of them would ever cut me a break simply because I was a County
118 Commissioner and we've known and/or worked together for years. When the County Attorney, BCA, and
119 Attorney General jointly announced that they weren't going to file any charges, I was relieved.

120
121 A lot has been made of the large amount of cash, about \$500,000, that I disclosed to the Mississippi Ethics
122 Commission, which collects and maintains financial information about state, county, and local public officials,
123 and investigates questions of financial irregularities. Now, to describe where that money came from, I have to
124 admit to you that, from time to time, I do like to tickle the felt. Which is to say I enjoy gambling. I only gamble
125 legally, of course: casinos, the track, trips to Biloxi and Las Vegas. Contrary to what anyone else might say, I have
126 never had any connections with organized crime or owed anyone any money related to gambling.

127
128 In mid-September of 2020, I went on a five-day cruise in the Caribbean and was fortunate enough to spend some
129 time at a casino in the Bahamas. I had a great run and, next thing I know, I am up a half million dollars. Great
130 luck, huh? As soon as I got back to the States I deposited the money in my bank account for safekeeping. I don't
131 have any receipts or anything. That money didn't come from Jess Ramsey. If s/he bribed me with cash to fix

her/his case, why on earth would I put that money in my personal bank account and declare it as income for tax purposes?

I did make a number of large cash purchases at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021 with the money I made gambling. But the articles in the paper make it sound like I spent money on lavish accommodations. I didn't buy a "mansion," it's really more of a fishing cabin. And I didn't buy a "yacht," I would describe it more accurately as a speedboat. I love my Hummer H3, though. It has in-dash navigation and satellite radio.

Sure, I remember Sidney Freeman. S/He is an agent with the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and conducted the investigation. Freeman was a great basketball player when s/he was at the University of Southern Mississippi, but I don't recall writing a recommendation letter for her/him. Though I do write a large number of letters.

I have no idea why Jess Ramsey has made up this story about me. Maybe s/he is just angry because s/he is in federal prison and s/he thinks that I had something to do with it. It seems awfully fishy to me that the only person that can verify this fairy tale is Joe Weaving, who disappeared as soon as Ramsey went to prison. Maybe he ran off with Ramsey's money.

This statement was given under oath. I have had an opportunity to read, review, and update this statement, and I attest that this is a true and accurate statement.

Signed,

Alex Green

Alex Green

SIGNED AND SWORN to me at 3:50 PM, October 17, 2022.

C. M. McCormack

C.M. McCormack, Notary Public

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WITNESS ADDENDUM

I have reviewed this statement, previously made by me, and I have nothing of significance to add at this time. The material facts are true and correct.

Signed,
Alex Green
Alex Green

SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the 2023 Mississippi High School Mock Trial Competition.

C. M. McCormack
C.M. McCormack, Notary Public

STATEMENT OF SIDNEY FREEMAN

1 My name is Sidney Freeman and I am an Agent with the Mississippi Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA),
2 and I am stationed in Magnolia, MS. Prior to my employment with the BCA I worked as a deputy in the Brooks
3 County Sheriff's Office in the computer crimes unit. I am currently assigned as a Special Agent in the white-
4 collar crimes unit with the BCA where I have been for the past nine years. I have been a licensed police officer
5 for twenty-two years.

6
7 I grew up in Eastover and attended the University of Southern Mississippi on a basketball scholarship. I was
8 named an all-conference point guard twice and never lost an All-State Classic against our rival Southern College.
9 For the students, fans, and alumni, that game is easily the most important game of our season. There are stories
10 of fights, divorces, and even a murder over that game. Even though I live in Magnolia now, I haven't missed an
11 All-State Classic since I graduated. Winning the Classic four years in a row certainly made members of my team
12 very popular among the alumni. We were frequently invited to alumni receptions hosted by some of Eastover's
13 rich and successful people. Since they donated significant money to the school, our coaches expected us to
14 make an appearance. But the parties were stuffy and forced us to miss all the good parties on campus. Most
15 of the time, the team would show up for the free food, shake some hands, and then take off.

16
17 I do remember attending a number of dinners at Alex Green's house. S/He was the Eastover City Attorney at
18 the time and was a major donor for the university athletic department. When I became a senior, I started seeing
19 Alex's parties as an opportunity to make some good connections for after graduation. I remember attending
20 the Green New Year's Party and having a long talk with Alex. We talked about my future and Green even invited
21 me to play in her/his big poker game later that night. During the poker game, Green invited me to do a joint
22 internship with the City and County Attorneys' Offices that final semester of school. I saw this as a great
23 opportunity to learn more about local government and interact with the police.

24
25 I started the internship in January that year but never worked directly with Green. I would see Green in the
26 halls, but I mainly worked with Tim Stokes, the Assistant County Attorney at the time. I learned a lot about
27 prosecution and the investigation process. Tim showed me around and introduced me to many
28 important people, including the Sheriff of Fondren County, Gary Waller. Sheriff Waller said he owed a lot of
29 his success from the breaks and tips that Alex Green provided him. Sheriff Waller introduced me to the
30 Brooks County Sheriff, Pat McGowan. Sheriff McGowan and I hit it off and he told me to look him up
31 after I graduated. I certainly used that opportunity to help me get into the law enforcement field. Anything
32 you can do to get your foot in the door, you know? I applied for an entry level position with the Brooks
33 County Sheriff's Office twenty-two years ago. My grades were average, and I had the internship on my
34 resume, but I wasn't confident I would get an interview. So I asked Alex Green for a recommendation. While
35 it was the first time I talked to Green the entire semester, s/he said s/he would send a letter. Sure enough,
36 the letter did the job and I was accepted into the Brooks County Sheriff's Office.

37
38 I graduated from the Police Academy ranked second in my class of eighty-seven new officers. I started my work
39 with the sheriff's office doing patrol and a lot of paperwork, but soon I was promoted to the computer crimes
40 unit. My work with Brooks County helped me get into the BCA. I am stationed in Magnolia, which is about 50
41 miles northwest of Eastover. I do think I am lucky to have met Alex Green at the time. I doubt Green realized
42 the impact s/he had in my career.

43
44 For the past six years, I have been focusing on corporate and political corruption. Magnolia's neighboring town,
45 Littletown, made the national news about four years ago when three city councilmen took bribes from a
46 company, EightyFour, Inc., which wanted to set up red light cameras in town. The councilmen called the bribes
47 "campaign contributions" and awarded the company the contract without any competing bids. I was appointed
48 special investigator to avoid any conflicts and to look into the entire situation. My investigation exposed the
49 conspiracy and the councilmen resigned. The investigation also led to the federal prosecution of EightyFour,

Inc. and its CEO B. Roth Daniels. Since that company had similar deals throughout the country, I was suddenly on national news and became a consultant for other investigations. I hadn't felt that important since my basketball days. So I enjoyed my time in the spotlight appearing on CNN, PTV, and even a special appearance on Ellen. Since that case, I have started writing a book on corruption investigations and municipal politics. I have also taught numerous seminars and academy classes on that subject. I don't consider myself an expert in the area, but I do feel I have some unique experiences to draw upon during similar investigations.

I would be done with the book by now, but other police departments have been calling and asking me to do investigations on individuals within their respective city or county governments. Naturally, a local police agency cannot handle the investigation because there is a conflict of interest. It is clearly improper to investigate the people who determine your department's budget. So to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, those departments will call me in to lead the investigation as a special investigator. I have developed a reputation as the Elliot Ness of Mississippi. Doesn't that sound like a good title for my book?

On August 17, 2021, I received a call from the Chief of the Eastover Police Department. He told me that a local CEO named Jess Ramsey was making accusations that the former County Commissioner, Alex Green, had taken a bribe before leaving her/his position on the County Board. Since I hadn't seen or spoke with the Commissioner in over twenty-two years, I didn't see this investigation as a conflict of interest. I enter all investigations unbiased and look for the hard evidence. I approached this investigation exactly the same way.

In corruption cases, we get phone calls all the time concerning people who claim that someone was bribed. I first like to look at who is making the call. In this situation, Ramsey was a convicted felon in prison and was well known around the area for living a pretty lavish lifestyle. Ramsey certainly hasn't been the best corporate citizen in our state.

On August 20, 2021, I visited Ramsey at Sandstone Federal Prison. During my interview, s/he told me that s/he had already pled guilty to bankruptcy fraud and didn't care what happened to her/him. Ramsey was very angry with her/his attorney relating to the conviction for fraud. During the discussion, Ramsey explained a plan s/he had with Commissioner Alex Green who would allegedly receive a payoff of half a million dollars and in return would steer the location of the planned route for the pipeline away from Ramsey's real estate development. The final vote was set for the December 19, 2020, County Board meeting. Ramsey stated that s/he gave her/his accountant, Joe Weaving, a briefcase containing \$500,000 on October 30, 2020. Weaving was then going to meet the Commissioner that night at 11:45p.m., at some motel in Littletown. Weaving was supposed to give the money to the Commissioner to complete the bribe. According to Ramsey, it all went according to plan. However, due to that blizzard in late December, the County Board meeting was canceled and the Commissioner wasn't able to vote. The vote was carried over to the first meeting in January and by then Commissioner Green had retired. This all sounded like a bogus excuse to me, but I still did a thorough investigation.

I also stopped by Joe Weaving's office on my way back to town on August 20, 2021. He denied that there were any bribes between Ramsey, himself, and/or the Commissioner. One of the most important pieces of evidence was a lead Weaving provided. During my talk with him, Weaving became frustrated with the direction of the conversation and told me to just look up the conference Green was supposed to be attending on October 30, 2020. I did some digging on the internet and discovered that several television news stations had covered the October 30, 2020, speech. PRT News, a Pearl River station, actually recorded the video of Green's speech and posted the whole 90-minute video on their website three days later, on November 2, 2020, with the timestamps for a start-time of 6:00 p.m. and a transcript to boot. I was also able to check Green's website, which had posted a link to the PRT recording, although I do not know when Green website made that link available.

My next step in the investigation was to see if Commissioner Green had any unusual expenditures and/or income increases since October 30. I pulled her/his disclosure reports from the Mississippi Ethics Commission. The document indicated that Green declared over \$500,000 in gambling winnings from a cruise s/he took with her/his spouse in September 2020 in the Bahamas. I called the cruise line and they confirmed Green was on

the cruise during that time. Their policy was to not comment or confirm any gambling winnings. I did track down a casino employee who confirmed that Commissioner Green did play roulette on the cruise and hit some big numbers.

Commissioner Green has a reputation around Eastover as a bit of gambler. So it looks like s/he had a pretty good trip to the Bahamas. I know Green has a weekly poker game and I know s/he hits the casinos around the state. I have heard stories that Green is a high stakes player and that the Las Vegas casinos offer her/him free rooms to play the high limit tables. I'm not sure if I believe all of that, but it looks like Green won a half a million on a cruise. So anything is possible with Commissioner Green.

After Green returned from the cruise, it appeared s/he spent some of those gambling winnings on her/himself. My investigation uncovered that Green purchased a new Hummer H3, a boat, and a new house on Choctaw Lake. The Commissioner certainly didn't hide any of these purchases. S/He claimed the property purchase on her/his 2020 disclosure form. The car and boat were both titled in the State of Mississippi. S/He paid sales taxes. I didn't feel the need to actually see the items since they were public knowledge. Green has always lived a pretty nice lifestyle dating back to those parties s/he threw when I was in college. Frankly, Green had a long and respected career, so s/he deserves to live the high life during her/his retirement.

I didn't feel the need to bother Commissioner Green with this investigation. The last thing this esteemed member of the community needed was some cop sniffing around her/his house and interrogating her/him. To me, the results were clear. You had a complainant who was a convicted felon and was angry. On top of it, a pipeline was going to be put through her/his property which resulted in Ramsey losing considerable value to her/his family business. Ramsey makes an outlandish charge against a well-respected Commissioner in the community and expects the charge to stick. The Commissioner's whereabouts on the night of October 30 were accounted for. Commissioner Green's purchases were not hidden and s/he claimed every penny of the gambling winnings. Considering that the \$500,000 was disclosed on the Commissioner's ethics report, it would be pretty easy for Ramsey to come up with that number.

I prepared a report and submitted it on August 30, 2021, to the Attorney General's Office. I never received any requests from that office to conduct any further investigation. I was never told of any criminal charges being filed – not that I expected there to be criminal charges. The file was closed and I went on to my next case. It was a bar fight in northwest Mississippi between officers from the city police department and deputies from the county sheriff's office. Of course, it was all over an alleged dirty slide during the softball game played earlier that night. That's a story for another time, though.

My policy has always been to not comment on any investigation to the press. I was a bit shocked when I read that story in the Eastover Ledger by some writer named Downing. It sounded like that reporter was trying to make a mountain out of molehill.

This statement was given under oath. I have had an opportunity to read, review, and update this statement, and I attest that this is a true and accurate statement.

Signed,



Sidney Freeman

SIGNED AND SWORN to me at 10:15 AM, October 21, 2022.



C.M. McCormack, Notary Public

152 **WITNESS ADDENDUM**

153 I have reviewed this statement, previously made by me, and I have nothing of significance to add at
154 this time. The material facts are true and correct.

155
156 Signed,

157 *Sidney Freeman*

158
159 Sidney Freeman

160
161 SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the 2023 Mississippi High
162 School Mock Trial Competition.

163 *C. M. McCormack*

164
165 C.M. McCormack, Notary Public

STATEMENT OF MORGAN REEVES

1 My name is Morgan Reeves, and I am currently the Edward R. Monroe Emeritus Professor at the School of
2 Journalism at Texas University. My specialty is ethics in the media. In addition to teaching, I also work closely
3 with the Society of Professional Journalists to continually develop and update ethical standards in journalism.
4 The goal of these standards is to ensure that the public can trust journalists and believe the stories that they
5 report.

6
7 Journalism has always been a passion for me. It started with my high school yearbook and has never let up. I
8 attended the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, a top-notch journalism school. I excelled
9 and graduated summa cum laude. I was Assistant Editor-in-Chief for the Daily Northwestern my senior year.
10 That year I also received the Abraham Lincoln Award for Excellence in Ethical Reporting for an article that I wrote
11 on Northwestern's honor code.

12
13 Even though my honor code article was award winning, it never received the recognition it deserved because of
14 an article written by Sam Winfrey, who was a classmate of mine and a junior at the time. Admittedly, Sam was
15 an exceptional writer with a particular gift for sniffing out big stories. But I had some serious questions about
16 how Sam landed such big scoops. As Assistant Editor, I felt like it was my duty to raise these ethical concerns,
17 but the Daily staff was too blinded by how talented and popular Sam was. Sam's article that year, exposing an
18 agreement between local police and the school to minimize the amount of campus crime actually reported, was
19 a big hit. S/He won several awards and helped the Daily Northwestern win Outstanding College Newspaper of
20 the Year. To this day, I still think Sam just got lucky with that story.

21
22 After college, I was hired by the Magnolia Herald as an assistant news reporter. I spent the next two years
23 reporting on all sorts of crimes. Homicides, drug busts, major car crashes, and the ebb and flow of crime in the
24 city. It was exciting, but reporting in the real world was pretty different from working for a college newspaper.
25 Finding the time to investigate stories and then write quality articles under a deadline was a lot of pressure. It
26 kind of got to me, but I was determined to stay with it.

27
28 Two years later, I joined the Choctaw Tribune. The paper hired me as a news reporter, but my "beat" was the
29 metropolitan area transit departments. Obviously, this could be considered a step down from the sort of work
30 that I was doing at the Herald, but I thought it might mean less pressure. I covered anything having to do with
31 transportation in Pearl River Metropolitan area – gridlocked traffic on I-20 and I-55, debates on whether to build
32 a light rail system, accidents on the tracks, you name it. I also attended countless hearings and meetings. I
33 reported what happened, but most of the time my stories ended up being killed to make room for
34 advertisements. It was pretty demoralizing.

35
36 I even tried joining a bunch of organizations to try to get more insider knowledge about the companies who
37 received transit department contracts. These folks had trade organizations, industry meetings, things like that. I
38 started joining mailing lists and showing up at meetings. I never tried to hide who I was or what I did. And
39 wouldn't you know it, it worked. The organizations started calling me, paying for me to attend trade shows,
40 sending me tickets to games, asking whether their name was going to be in the paper. They would call when
41 they'd won a big contract or had a new product. I put all this new "insider" information into my stories, but it
42 didn't help. In retrospect, maybe it wasn't the best idea to get so "buddy buddy" with those guys, but I just
43 wanted to get some hit stories. But no matter what I tried, the transit department just wasn't exciting and my
44 stories were still getting cut.

45
46 Around this time I realized that my strengths did not lie in traditional newspaper reporting. During my time at
47 the Herald and Choctaw Tribune I was really intrigued by how topflight reporters managed to find stories,
48 investigate them, confirm the facts, and then produce a quality article, all under a deadline. Even more
49 interesting, I wondered how new reporters ever managed to survive without established sources and insider

relationships. I became incredibly interested in learning how reporters across the country managed to consistently produce stories in an ethical way. Or, to put it another way, whether journalists across the country actually were reporting stories in an ethical way.

Following my instincts, I returned to school. I received a Master's degree in journalism from Alabama University, and in 1990, I was awarded the Aristotle Award for Outstanding Publication. I stayed at Alabama to earn my Ph.D and won the Benjamin Bradlee Award for Outstanding Doctoral Thesis. I was thrilled when I was offered a job as an associate professor at the School of Journalism at Alabama. I taught a media ethics course as well as introductory journalism courses.

Five years later, I was offered a full professorship at the College of Journalism at the University of Tennessee. Then, in 2000, I was offered a position at the School of Journalism at Texas University. I am originally from Texas, so I jumped at the chance. It was the best move I ever made. The school allowed me to teach courses focused on media ethics and, more importantly, I was able to take two sabbaticals to write my books, which was how I really made a name for myself.

My first book was published in 2011. It was entitled "The Truth is Behind Bars: Why America's Reporters Should Spend More Time Talking to Inmates and Less Time Listening to the Establishment." The book focused on the importance of convicted criminals as sources. Now, I will be the first to admit that relying on convicted felons is a risky proposition. But the simple fact is that convicted criminals – as opposed to those who have not yet been sentenced – have little to gain by talking. They're already convicted, and reporters can't commute sentences or offer immunity. So when a convicted felon comes forward and wants to talk, chances are he's telling the truth. But if a reporter uses an inmate as their main source, that journalist and her/his editor must go above and beyond the normal ethical standards. That is the only way to ensure the honesty of both the source and the reporting. Naturally, I was thrilled when my book was a New York Times Bestseller. It was also named a Top Ten Book of the Year by the New York Times, Washington Post, Boston Globe, and USA Today.

I loved writing my first book so much that I followed it up a few years later with "The Necessity of the Anonymous Source: Journalism in the Age of the Whistleblower." This book received the Cokie Roberts Award for Outstanding Media Commentary and was also named a New York Times Notable Book for 2014. Although the sales weren't quite as good as my first book, I was still content with the moderate acclaim that it received. I have also written a textbook on ethics that is widely used at the country's best journalism schools.

I suspect my books were what caught the attention of County Commissioner Alex Green. S/He contacted me shortly after Stevie Downing's article appeared in the Eastover Ledger. I asked the Commissioner to send me a copy of the article so that I could look it over. Imagine my surprise when I saw Sam Winfrey's name as Editor-In-Chief of the Monitor. I mean, last I heard of Sam, s/he was riding the wave of a Pulitzer Prize nomination after totally disgracing her/himself at the Boston Globe. Do you know, the day I heard about what happened at the Globe, I had to resist calling everyone from the Daily Northwestern and saying "I told you so!" But I thought that would be childish after all of these years. As for the reporter, I had never heard of Stevie Downing. I told Commissioner Green that I needed to look into how Stevie's article was investigated and sourced before I could advise her/him on whether there was a case against the paper. But I'm not going to lie, the fact that Sam was involved already had me thinking that some ethical corners had probably been cut in order to break a big, juicy story about a well-known and respected County Commissioner.

Commissioner Green's lawyer ended up retaining me to investigate Stevie Downing's reporting. I had never worked on a court case before and had no idea what to charge. I called some other folks in the field and contracted with Commissioner Green's legal team for \$300/hour for my investigation and research time and \$500/hour for testimony. My understanding is that these are pretty standard rates. In fact, I suspect I may not be charging enough because I've been overwhelmed with calls to help in other cases. I'm lined up for five upcoming trials, sometimes working for the paper, sometimes working for the article's target. I'm thinking that this may be a whole new direction for my career.

I don't even know where to begin about all of the problems with how this article was handled. My analysis was done using the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics, which I helped to write, and the witness statements of Stevie Downing, Jess Ramsey, Sam Winfrey, County Commissioner Alex Green, and Sidney Freeman. I guess I will start with Downing's mistakes.

First, a journalist should test the accuracy of her/his information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is totally impermissible. Here, Downing utterly failed to test the accuracy of the information given to her/him by Ramsey. Now, I am the last person to be critical just because Downing's primary source is a convicted criminal. But, like I said, the ethical standards are even higher when that's the case, and Downing had no one to corroborate even the smallest portion of what Ramsey said. Downing never confirmed Commissioner Green's whereabouts the night of alleged bribe and, more importantly, never found or talked to Joe Weaving. Plus, I could not find any evidence that Downing tried to corroborate whether Commissioner Green had, in fact, won a substantial sum of money gambling. Moreover, Downing did not follow up on her/his anonymous tip from the Eastover Police that an investigation of the bribery charges against County Commissioner Green was happening in Magnolia. There is simply no dispute that confirming the existence of such an investigation and learning the outcome of the police inquiries was vital to presenting this story in an honest, even-handed way. Finally, Downing's "confirmation" that Commissioner Green was disciplined for her/his involvement in gambling was nothing more than the inference Downing chose to draw from the Mississippi Ethics Commission's comments. These failures are unacceptable.

Second, because Downing failed to follow up with some of the individuals and entities listed above, s/he was forced to rely on anonymous or simply unnamed sources. This violates the journalistic standard that reporters should identify sources whenever feasible because the public should be allowed to judge a source's reliability. For example, Downing used an unnamed police source as justification for reporting that the bribery charges against Commissioner Green were being investigated. Because Downing failed to contact the BCA, the public was denied not only the details of any such investigation, but also the ability to decide how serious the investigation was, whether it was properly conducted, and what the outcome of the inquiry was. Such information would have been far more helpful than one anonymous source giving a tip.

Third, Downing did not avoid conflicts of interest. This problem is not readily apparent from the article itself but became obvious when I read her/his statement. Downing is clearly angry with County Commissioner Green for her/his alleged anti-environmental supporter sentiments and, it seems, holds the Commissioner responsible for Misha Finch's incarceration. Given this history, Downing never should have written this article. S/He is, very simply, not objective where the Commissioner is concerned.

Now we move on to problems not only with Downing's reporting, but Sam's editing. So, the fourth issue with the article is that both Downing and Sam failed to distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. The fact that this article appeared on page one of the news section does not change the fact that it is rife with opinion, innuendo, and inference. Conclusions are drawn without evidence linking the dots. The most obvious example of this problem is the pictures of Commissioner Green's recent purchases. The fact that someone bought a boat, house and car with cash is not evidence that Green took a bribe. And it was irresponsible to report and print an article that directly draws that inference when the reporter never even investigated known alternative sources of income for Commissioner Green. Sam never should have allowed that inference to appear and never should have allowed those pictures to run based on such a minimal foundation. The entire tone of the article is accusatory, not objective.

Fifth and finally, both Downing and Sam failed to remember that newsgathering may cause harm or discomfort and that pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance. They seemed to forget this standard in their quest to break a big story. Sam in particular allowed an article to appear that, in no uncertain terms, accuses a well-respected commissioner with a spotless record of taking a bribe from a notorious criminal, reneging on her/his promise, and living the high life on her/his dishonesty. It would be one thing if that were the obvious outcome

154 based on a thoroughly investigated, properly sourced, objectively written article. But that is not what happened
155 here. Instead, a cursory investigation, shoddily sourced, obviously biased article went to press. And
156 Commissioner Green's reputation will be forever tainted with it. Just the implication of it.
157

158 In the end, the only conclusion to be drawn is that both Stevie Downing and Sam Winfrey violated at least five
159 of journalism's cardinal rules. I think that it could safely be said that the Eastover Ledger, through its reporter
160 and editor, showed a reckless disregard for the truth when it printed the story about Commissioner Green.
161

162 This statement was given under oath. I have had an opportunity to read, review, and update this statement,
163 and I attest that this is a true and accurate statement.
164

165 Signed,

166 *Morgan Reeves*
167

168 **Morgan Reeves**
169

170 SIGNED AND SWORN to me at 12:35 PM, November 3, 2022.
171

172 *C. M. McCormack*
173 C.M. McCormack, Notary Public
174

175
176 **WITNESS ADDENDUM**

177 I have reviewed this statement, previously made by me, and I have nothing of significance to add at
178 this time. The material facts are true and correct.
179

180 Signed,

181 *Morgan Reeves*
182

183 **Morgan Reeves**
184

185 SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the 2023 Mississippi High
186 School Mock Trial Competition.
187

188 *C. M. McCormack*
189 C.M. McCormack, Notary Public

STATEMENT OF JESS RAMSEY

1 My name is Jess Ramsey. Currently I reside at 2300 County Road 29, which is the Federal Correctional Institution
2 in Mississippi. The Federal Bureau of Prisons classifies this institution as a “low security” federal correctional
3 institution; it’s often difficult to see the humor in that.
4

5 Before I was imprisoned as part of my plea deal, I lived in Eastover, Mississippi, a posh suburb near Magnolia. I
6 also used to run my own business, popularly referenced under my umbrella company Ramsey Real Estate, L.L.C.,
7 though I don’t miss much about that part of my life anymore. What I miss are my children, who I haven’t seen
8 in a year.
9

10 I didn’t grow up with much. My father worked for the railroad and my mother raised me and my three sisters.
11 But I caught a big break after graduating college. I’d been working to pay my way through school by building
12 houses. My boss convinced me to stay on and work with him as a partner instead of going to business school for
13 an MBA, so that’s what I did. We worked side by side for nearly five years, and then he became sick with a
14 terrible illness I don’t like talking about. What made it worse is that his adult children sued me when I took over
15 and dissolved the company while he was still in the hospital. The family made allegations of fraud against me,
16 and I settled that case to make it go away. The deal I worked out was that instead of admitting fraud, I admitted
17 that I exercised undue influence over my business partner while he was sick and mentally impaired in the
18 hospital, and I agreed to pay back a portion of the money his family demanded. I understand how it may seem
19 problematic to ask someone what they want to do with a multi-million-dollar partnership in that state, but I
20 didn’t have a choice. He never wrote a will and was weeks from passing away, so I did ask him to sign over his
21 share of the partnership to me in that moment of crisis, and I paid dearly for that mistake.
22

23 Fortunately, I still had most of the money left over from winding down the construction company. My spouse
24 thought I was crazy, but I decided to use my money to acquire two other home construction companies. Seems
25 like back then everyone I knew who had a little extra money wanted to own a big house. People who didn’t want
26 to live in Pearl River would drive an hour down the interstates to get to their jobs, so we just kept building
27 neighborhoods further out. By 1997, we were doing so well that I bought into a home mortgage-financing
28 company—my first of several. Not only was I in the home-building business, but now I had a company loaning
29 people the money to buy homes.
30

31 By the mid-2000s things were at their peak. My businesses looked small individually, but I had so many that if
32 you added them up, I would have been in the top-five for home real estate in Mississippi. We even started
33 spreading into Alabama with an affiliate, Basting Construction Co. Thousands of people, from all the dedicated
34 staff, contractors, and subcontractors worked for me in one way or another. Buying up whole farms and
35 replacing fields with neighborhoods full of houses went from something to celebrate to just another page in a
36 stack to rubber-stamp. And frankly, I was doing a good job transitioning away from building and focusing more
37 on the mortgage financing angle, which was almost as lucrative as my third venture, mortgage securities trading.
38 Things were so good we bought the naming rights to the stadium for the minor league baseball team in Eastover
39 – the Eastover Braves.
40

41 Not only were things great for my businesses, but they were great for me as well. My spouse Jamie and I had
42 three lovely children and owned the biggest home in Eastover. It had two pools, a basketball court, and my own
43 private driving range. We owned vacation homes in San Francisco, Texas, and Miami. We had three butlers and
44 a personal chef who traveled with us everywhere. I started collecting vintage airplanes that I stored in a hangar
45 I purchased at the local airport. It was an expensive lifestyle, but money was rolling in hand over fist.
46

47 In 2007, of course, things took a turn. By Fall 2008, the game was up, and the whole real estate market plunged.
48 Like many people in this business, I was not prepared for what I should have seen coming years ago. All my eggs
49 were in the real estate basket. Revenue dried up overnight, and debts came due. Oh, and lawsuits. I lost count
50 of the lawsuits. People who signed up for loans on their own free will accused me of giving them deals I knew

they could not afford. While there is obviously truth to that, as there is with much of the blame throughout the subprime mortgage crisis, I hired some good lawyers. Savvy bankruptcy strategies allowed me to avoid liability to many of my clients and creditors.

Besides bankruptcies, I made it out of the recession by buying up land while the price was cheap during the downturn. A lot of real estate investors decided to get out of the game after 2008. I went the other direction and doubled down. I knew it was risky, but I also knew it was just a matter of time until the market improved and fields of grass or crops became vibrant neighborhoods. In hindsight, this was not a good idea. I purchased too many tracts of land. Barren parcels might have a high payoff year down the road, but until they get developed, they earn nothing.

I just kept buying more land anyway. By 2012, I felt like not just a survivor, but a mastermind for making it out of the recession in one piece. That made me cocky. I would overbid on land just to lock down a community away from my competitors. Keep in mind, most new neighborhoods you see now since the recession happened were not yet built in 2012. The land prices were going up because we all knew the home builders and buyers would come eventually, but I still hadn't earned on much of anything I'd purchased.

I spent a jaw-dropping \$8 million dollars on the Reservoir Corridor plots of land. More to the point, I did not buy those plots with my own money, but loans – loans with an interest rate my credit deserved, which was not great. I would be unable to pay back the loan for a while. In fact, the size of the loan actually increased over the years I owned the land. At the time it was a solid purchase. The Reservoir Corridor is a beautiful stretch of land close to I-20, much of it on a noticeable slope with a great view of the river. A fantastic place for building houses, and honestly the last spot in the world I expected an oil pipeline to go.

You've probably heard of the concept of eminent domain before. Shockingly, it's constitutionally acceptable for the government to come in and force you to give them your land. All they have to do under the Takings Clause of the Constitution is pay you "current fair market value" for the land they are taking by force – emphasis on "current." You can probably see where this is going. When higher-ups announced their intent to ask the county for passage through the Reservoir Corridor in 2015, the fair market value of my plots of land was not its true value. A few houses had popped up by then, but not as many as there would have been – not by a long shot. The assessor believed my land was worth just 8 million dollars, the same amount I'd signed onto it for in 2012, before my loan had gained all of its interest.

Just like in 2008, the problems started as a trickle and then became a cascade. I filed suit to get a better price on the Reservoir Corridor, but it was clear I wasn't going to win that suit. My lawyers advised me, correctly, that I had overpaid for the land in 2012. And I had other land purchases nearby, too. Remember, this all happened in 2015 and 2016, during the controversies at the Standing Rock protests. Headlines about pipeline spills and ground and water contamination filled my news feed on social media. No one was interested in taking the Reservoir Corridor off my hands for more than the government's proposed price, and now my other purchases in the area were tanking in value because home buyers weren't going to want to live within miles of a dangerous oil pipeline if they could avoid it.

My chief accountant, Joe, advised me that we had only one option – get "political." Fondren County did not have much choice in the fact that the oil pipeline would run through the county, as that had already been determined by federal and state politicians. But they did have veto power over certain locations within the county as to where the pipeline would go. I knew it would be a split vote because of history. Four commissioners had already publicly backed one side or the other, leaving three in play, and I aimed to become friendly with one of them in particular. Jeb Farris was a well-known environmentalist. He'd worked on the park board for decades before getting relegated to county commissioner status. I knew he would vote to move the pipeline away from the Reservoir Corridor. For crying out loud, you can't put a pipeline on a hill sloping down toward a river! But then there was Kristina Olson. She was a former homeless outreach worker for a nonprofit in Magnolia, and she wasn't a big fan of mine. She had once accused me in a newspaper op-ed of being a mortgage fraudster, so I knew she would

deliberately vote against whatever I asked her. That left Green, one swing vote out of the seven that we could “persuade.”

I still had some liquid cash available for a rainy day. It wasn’t enough to get me out of my (by then numerous) holes, but it was enough to buy a miracle. I withdrew \$500,000 from a shell company account I’d saved since before the recession, and I gave it to Joe for his side of the plan.

I arranged for Joe to meet Green at some sleazy motel in Littletown at about 11:45pm on October 30, 2020. I remember the date of the meeting because it was the night before Halloween. I hear that Green claims that the bribe could not have happened that night because s/he was at a conference in Jackson. There’s supposedly a YouTube video of Green giving a speech at that conference. But I would point out that you can fabricate anything these days, and there’s no proof that the video footage posted on Green’s website was footage captured from October 30, 2020. It could have been from any time before that. Finally, I specifically remember Joe complaining because he had to drive to some hotel out of town to give Green the money. Why would he do that if he didn’t actually drive there? Right after the bribe occurred, Green announced that s/he would retire at the end of 2020, as soon as the contentious vote was over.

Everything was going perfectly. Until the blizzard hit and delayed the vote into 2021, rendering my payment irrelevant.

Joe informed me that this was a problem because by New Year’s Day Green would be gone for the term and we would soon get a new guy in her/his place, a disruptor anti-environmentalist who was unlikely to be sympathetic to anything we had to say. Joe and I called Green from Joe’s office on Christmas Eve to demand that s/he do something about this. Green told us that s/he would see what s/he could do. Green called us back that Friday and told me that I was out of luck. S/He wrote a letter to the county requesting that s/he be allowed to remain in the seat to cast a vote, but the other two commissioners could find no legal loophole to allow that to happen. I demanded Green to return my money and s/he refused, telling me s/he had already put it in the bank.

Eventually the County Board returned to hear matters for 2021, with Commissioner Dean in Green’s place. Joe told me we had no chance of winning with Dean, who was generally pro-business but particularly harsh on environmentalists. Since I was aligned with the environmentalists on wanting to move an oil pipeline, Dean was an eager stick in the mud to my agenda. The vote was 4-3 to deny our request to choose a different location for the pipeline, and just like that my business empire took another dive, this time for good.

When I declared a series of bankruptcies all over again in March of 2021, the investigators were already circling like vultures. They had a lot of questions for me – questions about what they considered to be spurious behavior in 2021, but also questions about 2008, which had not been asked to my face before. Questions like why I had conveniently invested and donated so many millions of dollars during the market crash that I did not report in my bankruptcy filings and how I conveniently came back into that money in 2010-2012. Questions like how I could possibly afford overpriced land deals when my credit had been in the toilet and I was supposed to be out of money to buy just about anything.

I accepted a plea in July 2021 and was sentenced to ten years in prison for bankruptcy fraud. Not that this will be a surprise to anyone, but prison is terrible. I was so upset about everything that happened that I called the police within a month of settling in prison. I told them everything that happened with Green. I told them about the oil pipeline problems, the bribe and the threats. That investigator, Freeman or something, came by one time. But s/he didn’t talk for very long and I never heard from her/him again. Later I found out Freeman got her/his job because of Green.

When the police angle went nowhere, I tried the press instead. It is difficult making calls from prison. You need money to pay for each call, and the calls are expensive. You also don’t have an internet phone directory. You have to use the old-fashioned Yellow Pages. It took a day, but I found who I needed. Next thing I know on

September 8, 2021 someone from the Eastover Ledger named Stevie Downing is meeting me at the prison. Stevie asked me what happened and I was more than happy to tell her/him. I wanted Green to get what was coming to her/him.

Apparently, the story was printed in the paper because fairly soon everybody wanted to talk to me. Several reporters tried to contact me about the story but the warden wouldn't let them all in. The story got picked up by the Choctaw Tribune and Reservoir Press and made big news all over the state. Everyone was saying Green would be put on trial.

The only people who knew about the plan for the vote were Commissioner Green, Joe, and me. Unfortunately, a week or so after I pleaded guilty and was sentenced, Joe disappeared. He apparently cleaned out his office and his apartment and left town, and I haven't heard a peep from him in months. A cell mate shared a rumor that he's back in Sweden where he has family ties. Maybe he got scared, maybe he wanted to start a new life, I just don't know. I wish he were here, though, to verify my story.

Well, that's all there is to tell. To be honest, I don't know much about Stevie Downing and the story in the paper. I only met Downing that one time in jail and never read the newspaper article – I am too busy trying to take care of myself in here. I sure hope Green doesn't win this case, though – that slimeball is guilty as sin and I know s/he has plenty of money because s/he got it from me.

This statement was given under oath. I have had an opportunity to read, review, and update this statement, and I attest that this is a true and accurate statement.

Signed,

Jess Ramsey

Jess Ramsey

SIGNED AND SWORN to me at 2:35 PM, October 3, 2022.

C. M. McCormack

C.M. McCormack, Notary Public

201
202 **WITNESS ADDENDUM**
203 I have reviewed this statement, previously made by me, and I have nothing of significance to add at
204 this time. The material facts are true and correct.
205
206 Signed,
207 *Jess Ramsey*
208 _____
209 **Jessie Ramsey**
210
211 SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the 2023 Mississippi High
212 School Mock Trial Competition.
213
214 *C. M. McCormack*
215 _____
215 C.M. McCormack, Notary Public

STATEMENT OF STEVIE DOWNING

1 My name is Stevie Downing. At the time of this statement I am thirty-eight years old. My parents were
2 forced to flee to the United States before I was born because they were involved in the resistance
3 movement against an oppressive government. They had been publishing an underground newspaper,
4 but they were eventually discovered by the secret police. To protect themselves, they escaped to the
5 United States. To keep them safe, the American authorities helped my parents settle in the small town
6 of Eastover, Mississippi. As a result, I was born in Eastover, not the old country.

7
8 My best friend was another kid from an immigrant family, Misha Finch. Misha and I did everything
9 together growing up, especially anything we could do outside. Misha and I would spend hours hiking
10 in the woods, sitting on a dock with our fishing poles in the water, or just climbing trees. In the summer,
11 it was even better. Misha's family had a lake house. Her family would let me join them in the summer,
12 and Misha and I would play soccer with some other local kids. As we got older, Misha and I biked, four-
13 wheeled, and skated all over. Of course, that was before Green Diamond Trucking built that huge
14 garage and loading facility. I know it was good for local business, but man I hated to see all that
15 beautiful open space that Misha and I used to explore fenced off. I don't think I ever swam in Half-Mile
16 Creek after Green Diamond started operation.

17
18 I had my heart set on journalism as a career fairly early on. Part of it was personal – I wrote well, and
19 the school newspaper was a place where I always felt accepted and welcomed. Part of it, too, was an
20 homage to my parents' struggles. They were forced to leave the old country because they wrote the
21 truth about what was happening. I worked hard and was accepted with a full ride Northwestern
22 University's journalism school. Northwestern is consistently ranked as one of the country's highest
23 ranked journalism programs. It was an honor to be admitted. The program was challenging, to say the
24 least. I had never written so much nor been held to such high standards. In every case but one, I rose
25 to the challenge. That one failure is the biggest mistake of my life.

26
27 I was in a class that required us to file daily stories from around campus, a requirement that was perfect
28 preparation for the demands of the newsroom in real life. Toward the end of the semester I was having
29 a particularly difficult week. I had two papers due, I had fifteen hours of work to do to keep my work
30 study job, and I was on the phone late with Misha, who was trying to get out of a bad relationship. By
31 Friday, I was frazzled, and I had to file a story that I just hadn't done any work on. In my desperation
32 to get the assignment done, I made a terrible mistake. I made up a story and turned it in.

33
34 I screwed up, I know. I lied when I made up the story. The next morning, I called my professor and
35 confessed. The deal we worked out was that I would fail the class but not get thrown out of the
36 program since I had confessed. I eventually retook the class and got an A, but the F stayed on my
37 transcript. That error in judgment made it difficult for me to get a job coming out of college, even with
38 a journalism degree from a highly rated school. No one wanted to take a risk on someone who had

made such a bad decision. Eventually, I landed a job with my hometown newspaper, the Eastover Ledger. I had known the then-editor, Anna Ray, from an internship I did in high school.

Things went pretty well for me starting out. Ray ran a traditional newsroom, which meant you had to pay your dues in order to move up the ladder. I eventually got my break in 2010 with a series of stories about some pollution on the outskirts of town. There was a big agribusiness – Frederick and Sons – that was running some farms near town and was dumping animal waste and feed products directly into the river. I spearheaded an investigation that caught them in the act when they were dumping out at the old Logan farm. The resulting investigation by the state shut down the company, and the farm has been abandoned ever since.

I’d say that my biggest accomplishment as a reporter came during the Morgan Phillips trial. I won the Denley, which is the local equivalent of a Pulitzer Prize, for my coverage of the case. I thought it was pretty clear that the jury did the right thing by finding him not guilty, but there are always folks who want to string someone up just on their reputation. I get calls all the time asking me to join a bigger paper, but Eastover is still home, and I can’t see leaving for anything.

Around that same time, I learned that the County was considering letting some company build a pipeline through Eastover. Can you believe it? They want to change more open green space and turn it into a pipeline? You don’t need to be a journalist to know that those things are bad news. Even if the pipeline doesn’t break, it can still leak. They also take up a lot of space; it isn’t just the 48-inch pipeline itself. The land around the pipeline has to be fenced off for at least 50 feet on either side. Can you imagine? A 100-foot-wide corridor running along the edge of town? No more biking or four-wheeling across trails. No more walking to school if you live on the “wrong” side of the pipeline. Not only would a proposed pipeline ruin the outdoors that I love so much about Eastover, but it would be terrible for the community as a whole.

Even though everything was going pretty well for me at this point, Misha ran into trouble. He and some friends from work stayed out too late one night. Misha swears he only had one beer, but he got pulled over leaving his favorite local bar. When they pulled him over, Misha blew a .04. That’s half the legal limit, except that Misha had a commercial driver’s license and was driving his work truck home from the bar. Because his truck was a “commercial motor vehicle,” I guess that means there is a lower limit. Anyway, he got charged with driving under the influence. It was a first offense, and Misha had a totally clean record before that. But then-City Attorney Alex Green, who had a reputation for being tough on young, blue-collar workers, decided not to offer any kind of plea deal. Misha ended up losing his commercial driver’s license for a while and getting the maximum criminal penalty. Losing his commercial driver’s license cost Misha his job at Green Diamond, which really set him down a bad road. He has not been the same since.

Needless to say, I was pretty incensed about this whole affair. So I did what I do best. I started poking around, asking questions, and doing research. I didn’t turn up anything while s/he was City Attorney, but I kept looking every once and a while. It wasn’t every day or anything like that, I just kept my ears

open for anything about Green. Sometime after Green got elected County Commissioner, I learned that s/he was a big proponent of the pipeline. Green only saw the potential tax revenues. Of course, the idea of a big installation near the pipeline and the prospect of even more industrial jobs coming to the County – as if we need that kind of work here – appealed to Green too. There was also a rumor that Green’s aunt or uncle was a soil engineer who worked for the pipeline company, but I never found any proof of that.

I wrote up what I found and ran it by my editor. Sam Winfrey was new to the paper, having just come into town from Detroit or somewhere. I had never really had much of a problem with her/him, but s/he hadn’t really been around all that long, either. Sam shot down my story, saying that s/he didn’t want to rock the boat this early into her/his tenure in town. I think Sam also said something about being concerned about my reference to Green’s relative who allegedly worked for the pipeline company, but I don’t think that Sam understood the County dynamics just yet. That pipeline was just such a bad idea. Also, it’s not like I said that Green was receiving a kickback from her/his relative. I just mentioned that there was a rumor that her/his relative worked for the pipeline company. I can’t say that I was particularly pleased about having the story killed, but it happens to every good journalist. Maybe it shouldn’t, but it does.

I first got involved with the article at the center of this whole mess in September 2021, when I got a voicemail from Jess Ramsey, the infamous head of Ramsey Wheels who pleaded guilty to bankruptcy fraud. Ramsey’s voicemail was pretty short. Ramsey just said that s/he bribed a member of the County Board of Commissioners to vote on having the pipeline run through a certain route, but the County Board still voted to have it follow a different route, which cost Ramsey a fortune. I wish I still had the voicemail, but I dropped my phone trying to take a call just after a City Council meeting a few days later and stepped on it in the dark. I couldn’t recover any messages.

Anyway, if what Ramsey said was true, it would be quite a story. So, in early September I drove to the Mississippi Federal Correctional Facility to visit with Ramsey. Like any good journalist, I took notes on our conversation. Ramsey was initially a little hesitant to talk about the situation, but eventually said, “Screw it. I’m already in jail. If I do more time because of this, at least I can take that rat Green down with me.”

I jumped when Ramsey said that Green was the County Commissioner involved. I made sure that Ramsey meant Commissioner Alex Green, who had just recently retired. Ramsey confirmed that Green was exactly who s/he was talking about.

Ramsey told me the following story: When s/he found out that Green was going to be on the committee that was going to initially consider the route the pipeline was taking, Ramsey’s accountant said that maybe there was a way to get the matter settled before the other interested parties had a chance to talk to the County Board. Ramsey’s accountant, a person by the name of Joe Weaving, worked for Green several years back, and knew that Green was up to her/his ears in gambling debts. Weaving said that if Ramsey happened to provide Commissioner Green with the way out of her/his

debts – say, half a million dollars – Green would express her/his gratitude by persuading the pipeline committee to require the pipeline to follow the route that Ramsey wanted, before the official committee meeting and before the other landowners had a chance to talk about the route with the County Board.

Ramsey told me that s/he jumped at the chance. S/He gave Weaving the money and Weaving reported back that everything had gone to plan. I asked Ramsey what had gone wrong. S/He laughed bitterly and said that Green resigned from the County Board before the first committee meeting about the pipeline. Ramsey said that the new chair of the pipeline committee was her/his former business partner, so Ramsey knew s/he could not approach that Commissioner about the pipeline or it would lead too much of a trail. I asked Ramsey if s/he had anything that could help verify the story. Ramsey said that s/he filed a complaint with the police a couple weeks prior in August, but that s/he hadn't heard anything further.

I started working on verifying Ramsey's story the next day. My first call was to Joe Weaving. Weaving was not in, and his secretary Sara Pepper said that he was out of the office for a little while. I followed up with another call a couple days later and found that the number had been disconnected. I don't know where Weaving is, and I have made no further attempts to contact him. At the same time, this made me fairly suspicious. I mean, fleeing town clearly means that he has something to hide, right? I also wanted to ask Weaving if Ramsey got a deal for coming forward about the bribery, but again, I wasn't able to find him. I also looked at Ramsey's court records on the courts' website, but there wasn't anything specific about her/his guilty pleas, so I couldn't tell if the sentence was reduced for saying anything about Green.

My next call was to the Eastover Police Department. They didn't have any answers for me immediately and told me that they'd call back. About ninety minutes later the desk sergeant called me back and said that the Police Department's official statement was a "no comment." He also said that he had been authorized to tell me that there was an investigation, but it was being done by a cop over in Magnolia. That information was strictly off the record, though.

I checked with a couple of my usual sources within the department. Only one of them knew anything about it, and he said that he had maybe overheard someone saying that they had done just a quick investigation but hadn't really looked too hard for anything incriminating. I never contacted anyone in the BCA, nor did anyone from the BCA contact me.

I also put in a call to County Attorney Stokes's office at the end of the day. S/He said that s/he didn't know of any official investigations or actions currently active against Commissioner Green. Then, almost as an afterthought, s/he added that if s/he was going to investigate something like this, s/he might put a call in to the Mississippi Ethics Commission.

The next morning when I got into the office, there was an envelope addressed to me without any sort of stamps or return addresses or anything. I opened it and inside was a letter from the Mississippi

Ethics Commission addressed to Commissioner Green. The letter said that Green was being censured for her/his involvement in high stakes gambling and sports betting. The letter stated that since Green had come forward to disclose this involvement voluntarily and had sworn to have no further involvement with the activity, the official Letter of Reprimand would be kept private. However, the letter warned, if Green engaged in any further gambling activity, the Ethics Commission would go public with its censure and maybe seek further action.

The letter was clearly identified as a draft letter and was also unsigned and undated. I didn't even know if it had been sent at all. Heck, I didn't even know who had given me a copy. However, Stokes's hint about the Ethics Commission kept coming back to me as I thought about the draft letter. I figured that s/he was showing a little immigrant family solidarity and had slipped me a copy of the letter that s/he had gotten from somewhere. I called her/him up and asked her/him about it, but s/he said that s/he had never heard of such a thing before. Of course, what else would you expect her/him to say?

Just to cover my tail, I gave the Ethics Commission a call to get confirmation that such a letter had been officially sent to Green. Its reply was that there was no such letter in the Commissioner Green's public file, and that they refused to comment on any past or present investigations, whether those investigations existed or not. This is exactly what the letter predicted that the Commission would say, so I took it as a confirmation of the letter's authenticity.

By this time, word had gotten out in the newsroom that I was running down a story on Commissioner Green. Someone mentioned that Green had been making some extravagant purchases within the last year. I got Vickie Olson, an ace freelance photographer who sometimes worked for the paper, to go check out how Commissioner Green was living these days. Vickie came back with pictures of a lakeshore mansion, a massive speedboat, and a shiny new Hummer. I got on the phone and started making some calls and confirmed that Commissioner Green had purchased each of these within the last year. More important, I thought, was the fact that the Commissioner had paid for each of these purchases in cash.

At this point I had everything I needed to write the piece. Just to go through all the motions, I knew I had to give Commissioner Green a call to give her/him a chance to refute the accusations and the associated evidence. I got through to the Commissioner, but our conversation was extremely short. I identified myself and Green barked into the phone that s/he knew who I was and had nothing to say to me at this time or any time in the future. It wasn't the first time I've had a phone slammed down by someone I've been trying to interview and I'd be stunned if it was the last.

Having done all the work I needed to, I wrote up the article and ran it by Sam Winfrey. Whatever concerns s/he had about stepping on Green's foot earlier had evidently evaporated. Sam appeared very excited about the article, saying to her/him that it was another story for the paper for sure.

The story ran on the front page of the Ledger on September 22, 2021 and was picked up by the Choctaw Tribune and the Reservoir Press the next day. There was a media furor over the story, and it turned

into something of a media spectacle here. Things quieted down until Green decided to sue the paper over the article.

This statement was given under oath. I have had an opportunity to read, review, and update this statement, and I attest that this is a true and accurate statement.

Signed,

Stevie Downing

Stevie Downing

SIGNED AND SWORN to me at 11:38 AM, November 10, 2022.

C. M. McCormack

C.M. McCormack, Notary Public

WITNESS ADDENDUM

I have reviewed this statement, previously made by me, and I have nothing of significance to add at this time. The material facts are true and correct.

Signed,

Stevie Downing

Stevie Downing

SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the 2023 Mississippi High School Mock Trial Competition.

C. M. McCormack

C.M. McCormack, Notary Public

STATEMENT OF SAM WINFREY

1 My name is Sam Winfrey and I am currently the Editor-in-Chief of the Eastover Ledger. I can't believe that I'm
2 here today. The article that we published on County Commissioner Alex Green was a great piece of reporting. I
3 know the Commissioner is influential but using a defamation suit to try and clear her/his name is nonsense. If
4 the Commissioner had a problem with Stevie's story, then s/he should have commented when Stevie called.
5 Now s/he is trying to drag down a very talented young reporter with this baseless case. This entire lawsuit makes
6 me steaming mad.

7
8 My career as a journalist began in college. I attended the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern
9 University, one of the top journalism schools in the country. My big break with the school newspaper – The
10 Daily Northwestern – came junior year when I wrote an article about how campus crime statistics were being
11 manipulated by local police and the administration. My article won the award for Outstanding College
12 Newspaper Article from the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, and they also named me College Reporter of the
13 Year. The Daily Northwestern was also named Top College Newspaper by the Society of Professional Journalists,
14 based in no small part on the popularity of my article. It was quite a ride. So it came as no real surprise when
15 my fellow staffers selected me as Editor-in-Chief my senior year.

16
17 What is amazing is that my story almost didn't happen because of Morgan Reeves, a classmate who was the
18 Daily assistant editor the year my story ran. We used to have weekly staff meetings to talk about upcoming
19 stories. I told the staff about my crime story and everyone was very excited. I had two sources – one in the
20 administration and one in the police department – who were willing to talk about the conspiracy. They would
21 only agree to be anonymous sources, though no matter how hard I tried they would not go on the record. For
22 me, and everyone else on the staff I might add, two anonymous sources with obvious insider knowledge was
23 good enough, but Morgan didn't think so. S/He thought that we needed someone named and on the record
24 before we could run with the story. Personally, I think Morgan was miffed about being upstaged by a junior.

25
26 I understand that Morgan was hired by Commissioner Green to testify about whether Stevie and I violated the
27 journalistic code of ethics. I'm not surprised. Morgan has had it out for me since college. And this is a good time
28 to point something out. There are newspaper reporters and then there are people who write about newspaper
29 reporters. They are not the same thing. Real reporters are in the field, getting stories, following leads, making
30 judgment calls. The people who write about them are normally safely enshrined at some college, talking about
31 "ethics" and "standards" and "public integrity." Those ideas are all well and good, but if reporters and the editors
32 who manage them were not occasionally willing to go out on a limb, then enormously important stories would
33 never be reported. Let me put it this way: where would this country be if Woodward and Bernstein had looked
34 at one another and said, "Well, he won't go on the record, so I guess we should ditch this whole Watergate story"?
35 If you look at any reporter's history – even the ones who eventually join the ranks of academia – you will find
36 some sort of close call. Not everyone crosses the line, but I bet even Morgan Reeves has put her/his toes in the
37 chalk.

38
39 Anyway, after Medill I went to work at the Chicago Tribune. I was an assistant news reporter assigned to cover
40 City Hall. Early on, I realized that I had a knack for building good relationships with people. I developed a great
41 network of insiders – aides to the mayor, staffers, clerks, secretaries, even maintenance people – who were my
42 eyes and ears. With the tips I heard, I was able to scoop some big stories. I moved up quickly and pretty soon I
43 was the reporter in charge of the City Hall beat. I stayed at the Tribune for about eight years, before taking a
44 job reporting for The Boston Globe. I stuck with the news division, though, because that is where all the action
45 is. At the Globe, I focused more on state politics and worked my way up to being the reporter in charge of all
46 state political reporting. I had sources in the legislature, with the lobbyists, the lawyers, and the staffers.
47 Nothing happened that I didn't know about.

But I had best fess up to one mistake that I made when I worked for the Globe. I heard through the rumor mill that the Speaker of the State House of Representatives had used public funds to buy junk bonds in his own name. I began to pursue the story, and contacted my main source in the Speaker's office, his secretary. She confirmed the rumors and told me that she would get me copies of answering machine messages left for the Speaker by his stockbroker. And she did produce the tapes, which seemed genuine. But none of my usual sources would corroborate her story. In fact, they denied it. Still, I convinced myself that people were staying silent because the Speaker was, after all, a very successful man. I decided to write the story anyway. Somehow, I convinced my editor to publish with just one source. The story ran. One week later, The Boston Herald ran a story, corroborated by multiple sources, that the secretary had been passed over for a promotion and had doctored the messages for revenge. After five years with the Globe, I was fired. There is just no other way to say it.

After the Globe I had trouble finding a job and ultimately had to take a step down in the ranks. In 1999, I went to work for the Detroit Free Press as a news reporter. No special beat, no exceptional assignments. I spent the next five years covering a little of everything. Crimes, car accidents, politics, scandals, trials, I did it all. Finally, I guess I'd paid my debt because they promoted me. Once again, I focused mainly on politics and was redeemed when, in 2009, I was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for an expose I did on pollution being dumped into local lakes by the automobile manufacturers. I didn't win, but suddenly colleagues who refused to take my calls were willing to associate with me again. I had a lot of other job offers but stayed in Detroit. I felt like I owed the paper something for taking a risk on me after I was fired.

In 2010, I learned that my mother had cancer. My father died a while ago and I am an only child. Because my mom lived alone, my only real option was to move home to Eastover to take care of her. So that's what I did. There is no major market newspaper nearby, and even if there had been, I could not have put in the hours needed and still taken care of my mom. So I resigned from the Free Press and moved home. I went to work for the Eastover Ledger and, as luck would have it, the former editor was looking to retire. I was named Editor-in-Chief of the paper in 2013.

Stevie already worked for the paper when I arrived. It was clear almost instantly that s/he was the best reporter at the Eastover Ledger. I spent a little while going through back issues of the paper and the stories that Stevie wrote about the dumping by the 4N Company in Woodland and the Smith trial were top-notch. Plus, I have to admit it; I am at a point in my career where I am looking to mentor a young reporter, to pass on my wisdom if you will. Stevie seemed like an excellent candidate because s/he was talented and ambitious. I'll admit, I really want to see Stevie succeed as a reporter. I've encouraged her/him many times to leave Eastover in favor of a bigger market. I mean, why win Page Ones when you could win Pulitzers? But Stevie is a lifer.

So it was tough for me to shoot down Stevie's idea for an article on Commissioner Green and her/his alleged bias against the environmental community. It really seemed liked Stevie was on to something. The information on disciplinary actions against employees s/he dug up was pretty compelling. But I learned my lesson the hard way in Boston and I simply was not willing to take on one of the most successful people in the community so early in my tenure. It was just too risky.

The Eastover Ledger, after all, was a long-time supporter of Commissioner Green. Even before my time, the paper always endorsed the Commissioner in elections. It has written dozens of editorials in support of tough decisions that Commissioner Green has made and also commending her/him for the charitable work that s/he does in Eastover. That is why this lawsuit really gets me steamed. After so many years of great press, what makes the Commissioner think we made up stuff to get her/him now? It's nuts.

Regardless, Stevie didn't bring up the Commissioner for about three years. In late 2021, I can't quite remember the date, Stevie mentioned to me in passing that s/he had a lead on possible bribery about the location of the pipeline that is planned to run right through the county. Stevie said that s/he heard that Jess Ramsey bribed a county commissioner to have the pipeline run one way and County Board voted to have it run a different way. It sounded juicy to me and I told Stevie to keep me posted. Big stories are tough to come by in a town the size

of Eastover, so I was excited that Stevie could be on to something. Stevie spoke to Jess Ramsey and when s/he got back to the office was nearly giddy with joy.

In mid-September, Stevie and I sat down to talk about the Commissioner Green story. Stevie filled me in on her/his interview with Jess Ramsey and Ramsey's allegations that s/he had paid Commissioner Green \$500,000 to rig the County Board's vote. The deal was for Green to rig the voting so that the pipeline ran the way Jess Ramsey wanted it to run. Stevie identified Joe Weaving, Ramsey's accountant, as the middleman who transferred the cash from Ramsey to the Commissioner. Immediately, I asked Stevie whether s/he had contacted Weaving. That was when I heard the bad news: Weaving had skipped town. I didn't ask whether Stevie had exhausted every possible avenue for locating Weaving. I presumed that Stevie did everything s/he could to find the accountant. After all, the accountant was the only possible person who could confirm Ramsey's story. Weaving's disappearance left us with one source, which is always dangerous territory.

But Stevie remembered my hesitancy about the first Commissioner Green story, so s/he had done more investigating. Stevie heard Ramsey had made a complaint to the police about the bribe. At first, I was skeptical of Ramsey's claim that s/he had complained to the police. But Stevie informed me that a desk sergeant with the Eastover Police Department had confirmed, albeit off the record, that an investigation into Ramsey's bribery charges was indeed being conducted through a BCA agent in Magnolia. And Stevie had confirmed the existence of this investigation through an independent anonymous source from the Eastover Police. Additionally, Stevie told me that s/he had a letter from the Ethics Commission reprimanding Commissioner Green for her/his involvement in high stakes gambling and sports betting. This news didn't surprise me at all. It's one of Eastover's worst kept secrets that Commissioner Green has a serious gambling problem. Not only does Green like to gamble, but s/he always seems to lose. That is just the sort of thing that is common knowledge in a small town like Eastover.

But back to the letter. I never asked to see it. Stevie is too good a reporter to tell her/his editor that s/he has a letter if s/he doesn't. I didn't need to see it. I knew Stevie would call the Ethics Commission to confirm and, in fact, Stevie told me that's precisely what s/he did. And the photos. Wow. A few days after our meeting, Stevie came back with photos of some recent purchases that Commissioner Green made in cash. Unbelievable. A huge new speedboat, a swanky lakefront mansion at Choctaw Lake, and a new Hummer H3. I hear that the Commissioner is claiming s/he won that money on some offshore cruise. But anyone who has ever gambled with the Commissioner knows that the likelihood of her/him winning that much at gambling is as likely as a blizzard in the middle of a Mississippi summer. Finally, I made sure to ask whether Stevie called Commissioner Green to ask for a comment. S/He had. And that was all that I needed to hear.

I mean, add it up. We had Ramsey, a convicted felon with nothing to lose, giving us the details of the bribery scheme. We had the middleman Weaving leaving town under mysterious circumstances. We had two sources confirming that the Eastover powers-that-be were concerned enough about Ramsey's accusations to launch an independent investigation. We had the Ethics Commission confirming the Commissioner's involvement with gambling. And we had the Commissioner her/him making lavish purchases in cash mere months after s/he supposedly took a bribe. Let's face it, sometimes when there's smoke, there's fire. We had a thoroughly investigated, well-written piece of reporting that exposed county commissioner corruption at the highest local levels. Also, let's not forget that Commissioner Green had a chance to comment and didn't. You bet I ran the story.

The Eastover Ledger adheres to the Society of Professional Journalists' ethical standards and those standards were followed here. I resent the implication that either Stevie or I failed to perform in accordance with the highest standards of journalism. Not every article can be written in a perfect world where facts are easily confirmed, sources are always available, and everyone is willing to speak on the record. Excellent investigative journalism is risky and more often than not the people who are exposed are angry, resentful, and embarrassed. But that doesn't make them innocent. And suing the Ledger won't keep us from reporting on corruption in the future. I don't care how many Commissioner Greens sue us.

This statement was given under oath. I have had an opportunity to read, review, and update this statement, and I attest that this is a true and accurate statement.

Signed,

Sam Winfrey

Sam Winfrey

SIGNED AND SWORN to me at 2:35 PM, October 13, 2022.

C. M. McCormack

C.M. McCormack, Notary Public

WITNESS ADDENDUM

I have reviewed this statement, previously made by me, and I have nothing of significance to add at this time. The material facts are true and correct.

Signed,

Sam Winfrey

Sam Winfrey

SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the 2023 Mississippi High School Mock Trial Competition.

C. M. McCormack

C.M. McCormack, Notary Public

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF FONDREN COUNTY
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI**

ALEX GREEN,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	CIVIL ACTION NO: 2023-MT
)	
EASTOVER LEDGER)	
)	
Defendant.)	

Jury Instructions

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you have been considering the case of *Alex Green v. Eastover Ledger*. You have heard the evidence and the allegations of the parties, and I will not repeat them here. It is now my duty to instruct you on the law which you will use to render a verdict in this case. The order in which I give the instructions is not important. Consider all the instructions together. You must apply the law in these instructions whether you agree with it or not.

You must follow all of the instructions. Do not single out some and ignore others—all of them are equally important. I will give you a copy of these instructions to take into the jury room. You do not need to take notes as I read the instructions to you.

Duties of the jury and the judge

You must decide what the facts are from the evidence you have heard and seen. You must apply the law to these facts. I will explain which laws apply.

Do not take anything I do or say as a sign of what the answers should be.

Deciding the facts

Decide the case on the evidence. Base your decision only on the evidence you have seen or heard in this courtroom. You must not let events outside the courtroom influence you.

Impartiality

You cannot take sides based on personal likes, dislikes, or prejudices.

You must not be concerned that a particular answer on the verdict form is favorable to one party or the other.

Duties of the attorneys

The attorneys have professional duties:

1. They represent their clients.
2. They introduce evidence to support or defend their clients.
3. They make objections.
4. They argue their clients' cases.

Statements of the attorneys and judge

Nothing the attorneys say during the trial, including opening statement and closing argument, is evidence. The attorneys' questions are not evidence. The witnesses' answers are evidence.

What I say or what the attorneys say about the evidence may be different from what you remember. If that happens, rely on your own memory.

What the attorneys say about the law may be different from what I say. If this happens, you must rely on what I say about the law.

Rulings on evidence

The law has rules about the evidence allowed in a case. It is my duty to make sure the rules are followed.

Objections

Attorneys objected if they thought a question or answer was against the rules. Keep the following in mind about objections:

1. If I sustained the objection, ignore that question or answer.
2. If I overruled the objection, that answer is evidence like anything else.
3. Remember that objections by themselves are not evidence.
4. The fact that evidence has been objected to should not affect your view of the evidence.

Evidence that is not allowed

I have told you when other types of evidence are against the rules and have to be ignored or stricken from the record.

Deliberation and Return of Verdict

Here are some instructions about your deliberations and return of the verdict.

Items that will be in the jury room

During your deliberations you will have the following items in the jury room:

1. Any exhibits received in evidence;
2. The notes you took during the trial;
3. The written final instructions; and
4. The verdict form.

Selection of a foreperson

When you return to the jury room to discuss this case, you must select a jury member to be foreperson. That person will lead your deliberations.

The jurors' duty to discuss the case

The goal of jury deliberations is to talk among yourselves in order to reach an agreement about the verdict. This agreement must be consistent with your own judgment. Each of you must decide the case for yourself, but do so only after you have fully considered the views of your fellow jurors. Re-examine your own view and do not be afraid to change your mind if you decide your original view was mistaken. But do not change your mind just because other jurors disagree or simply because of pressure to return a verdict.

Return of the verdict

When you agree on a verdict, notify the jury attendant. You will return to the courtroom where your verdict will be received and read out loud in your presence.

Secrecy of the jury deliberations

Your deliberations must be secret and confidential. You must not communicate with anyone except other jury members about the case during your deliberations. During your deliberations, you may have questions about things unrelated to the case itself such as supplies or the physical facilities. If so, ask the jury attendant.

Juror's responsibility

You must not allow sympathy, prejudice, or emotion to influence your verdict.

The quality of your service will be reflected in the verdict you return to this court.

A just and proper verdict contributes to the administration of justice.

Direct and circumstantial evidence

A fact is proved either by direct evidence or circumstantial evidence or both. The law does not prefer one form of evidence over the other:

1. A fact is proved by direct evidence when, for example, it is proved by a witness who testifies to what s/he saw, heard, or experienced, or by physical evidence of the fact itself.
2. A fact is proved by circumstantial evidence when its existence can be reasonably inferred from other facts proved in the case.

For example, the fact that "a person walked in the snow" could be proved:

1. By an eyewitness who testified directly that s/he saw a person walking in the snow, or
2. By circumstantial evidence of footprints in the snow, from which it can be indirectly inferred that a person had walked in the snow.

Using direct and circumstantial evidence

You should consider both kinds of evidence. The law makes no distinction between the weight given to either direct or circumstantial evidence.

It is up to you to decide how much weight to give any kind of evidence.

Guidelines for evaluating testimony

You must decide what testimony to believe and how much weight to give it.
Here are some guidelines:

1. Will a witness gain or lose if this case is decided a certain way?
2. What is the witness's relationship to the parties?
3. How did a witness learn the facts? How did s/he/they remember and tell the facts?
4. What was her/his/their manner?
5. What was her/his/their age and experience?
6. Did the witness seem honest and sincere?
7. Was the witness frank and direct?
8. Is the testimony reasonable compared with other evidence?
9. Are there any other factors that bear on believability and weight?
10. In addition, you should rely upon your own experience, good judgment, and common sense.

Guidelines for impeachment

You have heard evidence challenging witnesses' credibility. This is called "impeachment evidence."

1. Past inconsistent statements

You may consider what the witness did or said in the past, if it is not consistent with what s/he/they is saying now. This is called a "past inconsistent statement."

If the witness who made the past inconsistent statement is a party (or a party's employee/agent) then you may use the past statement to decide the issues in this case as well as to decide the truth and weight of what the witness is saying now.

If the witness who made the past inconsistent statement is a not a party and the past statement was not under oath, use it only to decide the truth or weight of what the witness is saying now.

If the past statement was under oath, then you may use the past statement to decide the issues in this case as well as to decide the truth and weight of what the witness is saying now.

2. Conviction

You may consider whether the witness has been convicted of a crime. You may consider whether the kind of crime makes it more likely that s/he is not telling the truth.

3. Reputation

You may consider a witness's reputation for truthfulness.

It is up to you whether you accept all, part, or none of witness's testimony.

Opinion testimony

Most witnesses are allowed to testify only about what they saw, heard, or experienced. Usually, they are not allowed to give their opinions. Some witnesses, called expert witnesses, are allowed to give their opinions, because they have special training, education, and experience. When you evaluate an expert witness's opinion, you should consider the following guidelines:

1. The education, training, experience, knowledge, and ability of the witness;
2. The reasons given for the opinion;
3. The sources of the information relied upon; and
4. The other guidelines already given to you for any testimony.

You need not give this opinion testimony any more importance than other evidence.

Deciding the issues in a case

For the Plaintiff to prevail, they must meet a burden of proof. Specifically, the Plaintiff must prove the Defendant is liable by a preponderance of the evidence. This means that all of the evidence, regardless of which party produced it, must lead you to believe that the claim is more likely true than not true. If the preponderance does not support the Plaintiff's case on each and every element of the claim, then you must find the Defendant not liable.

Preponderance of the evidence does not necessarily mean the greater number of witnesses or the greater volume of evidence.

Any believable evidence may be enough to prove that a claim is more likely true than not.

Elements of Defamation—Plaintiff a Public Official or Public Figure

Your verdict must be for plaintiff if you believe:

First, defendant published the newspaper article containing statements that Plaintiff Alex Green accepted a bribe in exchange for agreeing to improperly affect or influence the outcome of the County Board's decision on Jess Ramsey's pipeline application in Ramsey's favor;

Second, such statements were false;

Third, Defendant Eastover Ledger published such statements either:

- (a) with knowledge that they were false; or
- (b) with reckless disregard for whether they were true or false

Fourth, such article was read by the public; and

Fifth, Plaintiff Alex Green's reputation was damaged.

Publication

A defamatory statement or communication is published if it is communicated to, and understood by, at least one person other than Plaintiff Alex Green.

For purposes of the publication element, it does not matter if a publication is simply republishing the defamatory, false claims of another person with attribution. If the defamatory, false statements of another are republished in a manner that intentionally or recklessly implies the statements are true, then the republication itself is defamation.

Intentional publication

A publication is intentional if:

1. It is made for the purpose of communicating the defamatory matter to a person other than Plaintiff Alex Green; or
2. With knowledge that the defamatory matter is substantially certain to be communicated.

Vicarious Liability – Employer Liable for Acts of Employees

An employer is liable for the acts of its employees if the employees are acting within the scope of their employment.

You are instructed that the actions of Stevie Downing and Sam Winfrey related to their reporting, writing, and publishing of Exhibit 1 were within the scope of their employment. As a result, if Downing and/or Winfrey, acting in combination or individually, defamed Plaintiff Alex Green, then Defendant Eastover Ledger is liable for defamation.

Exhibit 1

September 22, 2021

Eastover Ledger

A DISHONEST THIEF: Retired County Commissioner Accused of Taking Bribe to Change Pipeline Location

By Stevie Downing

Eastover – Former Eastover City Attorney and retired Fondren County Commissioner Alex Green has been accused of taking bribes in connection with the pipeline placement involving the property of Jess Ramsey, the former President and CEO of Ramsey Real Estate, LLC. Ramsey, who is currently serving a ten-year sentence at the Mississippi Federal Correctional Institution, claims that s/he paid Commissioner Brooks \$500,000 in exchange for her/his vote to change the pipeline route.



Commissioner Green enjoying his/her new boat on Choctaw Lake.

Commissioner Green has refused to comment on this accusation.

Ramsey alleges that Joe Weaving, her/his accountant and a former County Planning Manager and next-door neighbor of Commissioner Green, arranged the transaction on October 30. “It was supposed to be simple,” Ramsey said. “I would pay Green half a million dollars, and Green would change the pipeline route.”

The meeting did indeed happen October 30. According to Ramsey, Green received the payoff but failed to follow through with her/his part of the transaction. “S/He retired before ever voting on the pipeline route. It’s bad enough that s/he was taking bribes, but s/he wasn’t even honest enough to hold up her/his end of the bargain,” stated Ramsey.



A Hummer was just one of Commissioner Green’s luxury purchases.

Since her/his retirement, Commissioner Green has made a number of luxury item purchases, including a new Hummer H3, a lake house, and a small yacht. Subsequent investigation has revealed that Commissioner Green paid for each of these purchases with cash.

Commissioner Brooks is also well known as a habitual gambler. Due to his/her involvement with this illegal activity, s/he has been admonished by the Mississippi Ethics Commission.

Weaving, would not speak to the Cahill Monitor regarding these accusations, and has left the country indefinitely.

The Cahill Police Department refused to officially comment on this issue. However, Ramsey claims that after making a plea bargain to unrelated federal charges of bankruptcy fraud, s/he notified the Cahill police of the Commissioner’s involvement with bribery. The department conducted a cursory investigation of the incident, but a source within the department, speaking on the condition of anonymity, stated that they decided not to pursue the matter.

Exhibit 2

Eastover Inn
4421 West Highway 90
Pearl River, MS 56145
507-555-1234

CUSTOMER COPY

GREEN, ALEX
123 Taconite Mining Drive
Eastover, MS 56650

DATE	DESCRIPTION	CHARGE/PAYMENT	BALANCE
11/03/20	VISA CARD PAYMENT	(\$502.74)	(\$502.74)
11/03/20	SALES TAX	\$8.79	(\$493.95)
11/03/20	ROOM CHARGE	\$75.00	(\$418.95)
11/02/20	SALES TAX	\$8.79	(\$410.16)
11/02/20	ROOM CHARGE	\$75.00	(\$335.16)
11/01/20	SALES TAX	\$8.79	(\$326.37)
11/01/20	ROOM CHARGE	\$75.00	(\$251.37)
10/31/20	SALES TAX	\$8.79	(\$242.58)
10/31/20	ROOM CHARGE	\$75.00	(\$167.58)
10/30/20	SALES TAX	\$8.79	(\$158.79)
10/30/20	ROOM CHARGE	\$75.00	(\$83.79)
10/29/20	SALES TAX	\$8.79	(\$75.00)
10/29/20	ROOM CHARGE	\$75.00	(\$0.00)
CREDIT DUE:			(\$0.00)

Exhibit 3



_____, 20__

DRAFT LETTER

Alex Green
123 Taconite Mining Drive
Eastover, MS 56650

Dear Alex Green:

It has come to the attention of the Mississippi Ethics Commission that you have been rumored to be involved in certain gambling and sports-betting activities, some of which may have involved relatively large amounts of money. If true, this would constitute a gross violation of your ethical duties as a commissioner and could be considered grounds for severe censure. As it stands, even the mere suggestion of such activities threatens to stain your reputation for fairness and evenhandedness.

Due to the fact that no official investigation has taken place, and as a professional courtesy, please regard this as an unofficial Letter of Reprimand. Its contents will not be made public or be placed in the public archives. However, should your actions continue, this Office will decline to extend you the same courtesy in the future.

Please consider yourself warned.

Sincerely,

Josephine Hamms, J.D.,
Executive Director

Exhibit 4

CODE OF ETHICS

Preamble

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.

Seek Truth and Report It

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Journalists should:

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
- Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
- Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.
- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story.
- Never plagiarize.
- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
- Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.
- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.
- Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
- Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.

Minimize Harm

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

Act Independently

Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.

Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
- Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

Be Accountable

Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

Journalists should:

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

Exhibit 5

From the Eastover Ledger – November 2, 2020

Commissioner Alex Green Announces Retirement

In a press release dated today and issued from her/his office, Commissioner Alex Green announced her/his retirement after twenty years of service.

Commissioner Brooks has served Eastover as a City Attorney and Commissioner for the past 40 years and is well known around town for her/his charitable endeavors, including service for the Red Cross and the Rotary Club. Commissioner Green is also very involved at her/his alma mater, the University of Southern Mississippi.

Exhibit 6 (3 pages)

***Curriculum Vitae* for Dr. Morgan Reeves**

Current Employment

Edward R. Murrow Emeritus Professor (2005-present)
School of Journalism at Texas University
Currently teaching “Ethics in the Age of New Media” (fall semester 2018) and “The Pentagon Papers: Did the Courts Get It Right?” (senior seminar spring semester 2019)

Previous Employment

William O'Reilly Professor of Media Ethics (1990-2005)
Dean of Ernie Pyle School of Journalism (2000-2005)
Ernie Pyle School of Journalism at Texas University
Courses: “Media Ethics”
 “Newspaper Presentation”
 “Reporting in the 21st Century”
 “Ethics in the Newsroom”
 “Feature Writing for Newspapers”

Professor of Journalism (1998-2000)
College of Journalism at the University of Tennessee
Courses: “Media Law and Ethics”
 “Advanced Newspaper Reporting”
 “Editing 300”

Associate Professor of Journalism (1993-1998)
School of Journalism at Alabama University
Courses: “Media Ethics in the 20th Century”
 “Beginning Reporting”
 “Beginning Editing”

Choctaw Tribune-Tribune (1987-1989)
Reporter, News Department (City Transit Department)
Responsibilities included reporting on new transportation developments such as the location of new light rail system, traffic gridlock, crime on the transit system, and changes or improvements to the citywide transit system.

Magnolia Herald (1985-1987)
Reporter, News Division
Responsibilities included reporting on crimes occurring in Magnolia, including homicides, robberies, assaults, and trials when applicable.

Exhibit 6 (3 pages)

Education

Ph.D, Alabama University (1991-1993)

M.S.J., Alabama University (1989-1991)

GPA: 3.7 (*magna cum laude*)

B.S.J., Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University (1981-1985)

GPA: 3.8 (*summa cum laude*)

Assistant Editor-in-Chief, *The Daily Northwestern*

Publications

(Note: Below is an excerpt of most recent publications. A complete list of publications will be provided upon request).

“Bloggers Are the Enemy: How New Media Outlets Are Undermining Journalistic Standards.” *American Journalism Review*, Vol. 207, October 2015.

“Lessons From the Front: What Reporters Can Learn From Jayson Blair & Stephen Glass.” *Columbia Journalism Review*, Vol. 45, September 2015.

“He Said What? Ensuring the Accuracy of Quotations and Attributions.” *The Ohio State Journalism Review*, Vol. 66, February 2015.

“The Necessity of the Anonymous Source: Journalism in the Age of the Whistleblower.” Simon & Schuster, 2014.

“The Truth is Behind Bars: Why America’s Reporters Should Spend More Time Talking to Inmates and Less Time Listening to the Establishment.” Simon & Schuster, 2011.

“Journalistic Standards 2010.” (Author: Chapters 1, 3, & 12) Simon & Schuster, 2010.

“Ethics in Journalism.” (Textbook) Simon & Schuster, 2005.

Awards & Honors

Pew Center for Civic Journalism Ethics Award (2016)

Columbia Journalism Review Best Article Award for “Lessons From the Front: What Reporters Can Learn From Jayson Blair & Stephen Glass.” (2015)

“The Necessity of the Anonymous Source: Journalism in the Age of the Whistleblower” recognized as a New York Times Notable Book. (2014)

Exhibit 6 (3 pages)

Cokie Roberts Award for Outstanding Media Commentary for “The Necessity of the Anonymous Source: Journalism in the Age of the Whistleblower.” (2014)

“The Truth is Behind Bars: Why America’s Reporters Should Spend More Time Talking to Inmates and Less Time Listening to the Establishment” recognized as Top Ten Book of the Year by the New York Times, Washington Post, Boston Globe and USA Today. (2011)

Ernie Pyle School of Journalism Professor of the Year Award. (2003, 2007, & 2015).

Benjamin Bradlee Award for Outstanding Doctoral Thesis “Journalistic Ethics in the Me Decade: How Today’s Wall Street Tycoons Are Buying Good Press” (The Ohio State University). (1993)

Aristotle Award for Outstanding Publication: “Why the Public Cannot Trust the Government: The Nixon Effect” (University of Chicago). (1990)

Abraham Lincoln Award for Excellence in Ethical Reporting (Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University). (1985)

Professional Associations

Chairman, Society of Professional Journalists’ Committee on Ethics (2016-2017).

Member, Society of Professional Journalists’ Committee on Ethics (2002-2006 & 2010-2016).

Member, National Association of Newspaper Columnists (1985-present).

Committee Chairman, Association for Excellence in Journalism (1998-2001).

Exhibit 7



May 2, 1993

Captain Ron D. Ryan
Brooks County Sheriff's Department
950 S. Fifth Street
Florence, MS 55402

Dear Captain Ryan:

I hope this letter finds you in good health and spirits. It was a pleasure seeing you again at the Eastover Rotary Charity Auction last month. I trust you will be able to attend the charity poker event next month with the University of Southern Mississippi Athletics Booster Club.

I am writing on behalf of University of Southern Mississippi basketball player Sidney Freeman, who worked as an intern in my office for the past semester. As you know, our co-internship program with the Fondren County Attorney's Offices provides students a well- rounded, "hands on" experience that is second to none. Sidney Freeman has been a valuable addition to my support staff. Sidney has also excelled under the direction of the Fondren County Assistant Prosecutor, Tim Stokes. It is my understanding that Sidney's intelligence and common sense has impressed many in our offices.

A two-time MVP of the Congdon Classic, Sidney is now interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement. I am pleased to recommend Sidney's admission into the Brooks Police Academy. As you are well aware, your program can never have too many Southern Miss graduates.

Sincerely,

A.G.

Alex Green
Eastover City Attorney