



U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
Western District of Arkansas*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
OCTOBER 14, 2008

CONTACT: ROBERT BALFE
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
(479) 783-5125

Greenwood Mayor Target of Sign Probe

The Sebastian County Sheriff's Office on Monday began an investigation into whether Greenwood Mayor Ken Edwards stole campaign signs opposed to a city sales tax increase over the weekend.

A Greenwood police officer pulled over a vehicle early Sunday morning in the area of North Main and West Denver streets, according to Capt. William Hollenbeck of the Sheriff's Office.

Edwards was a passenger in the vehicle driven by Gordon Griffith.

Police received information at about 2:30 a.m. from a witness who reported seeing a vehicle stopping at Ware Road and Arkansas 10 and someone getting out and taking something big from the yard, according to a police report.

Once police officer Mike Oliver realized who was in the vehicle, he contacted the Sheriff's Office and Deputy Bill Shibley arrived to file a report.

Greenwood Police Chief Keith Jackson said the matter is a conflict of interest for his department and so the investigation was turned over to the Sheriff's Office. Edwards is Jackson's boss.

Hollenbeck said investigators were meeting with the parties involved, interviewing witnesses and trying to determine the facts. Once the investigation is complete, it will be compiled and given to the Prosecuting Attorney's Office to determine if misdemeanor theft of property occurred and whether an arrest will be made, he added.

"All we are trying to do is find out what the truth is," Hollenbeck said.

Edwards called a news conference late Sunday to explain the situation as a

misunderstanding. The mayor said Monday he removed three signs and was going to return them.

“There was a sign in my yard; I thought it was joke,” Edwards said “People do this as a joke. Another sign was on a property of someone who had not given permission and there was one out in the highway right of way.”

Edwards said that placing signs in the highway right of way during the weekend is an old political trick because the highway department does not work during the weekend so it remains there until Monday morning.

Greenwood Councilman Jim Newcomb says he co-owns the signs with Wade Dunn and Gary Pettway and that he filed a theft report with the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office on Monday.

Edwards alleges that Newcomb is under investigation by state and federal authorities and in turn is trying to drag him down with him.

“This is politics as usual with Newcomb,” Edward said.

Newcomb said the mayor is lying. He added that he spoke with the Greenwood Police Department, the Sheriff’s Office and the Arkansas State Police and there are no investigations under way.

“This is a sideshow to take the attention off the mayor,” Newcomb said.

Newcomb says the signs, which state, “Vote No to extend the city sales tax,” are an extension of free speech. He added that the mayor should go buy “Vote Yes” signs instead of “stealing” his.

The two have been at it before.

An investigation of a harassment complaint filed Oct. 26 by Sabrina Edwards of Greenwood against Newcomb did not rise to the level of criminal conduct, Sebastian County Prosecuting Attorney Gunner DeLay said previously.

The allegations were that Newcomb had been following her, driving by her residence and taking her picture with his cell phone.

Newcomb told the Times Record the allegations weren’t true.

He said he had been taking architectural pictures, and although Sabrina Edwards was included in one of them, that wasn’t his intent.

He contended at the time that the police report was an intimidation effort intended to stop him from questioning the mayor’s expense reports.

Edwards also alleged Monday that Newcomb is following Edwards' wife again.

Newcomb denies the new allegations.