

Vukmir campaign: Former Baldwin and Kohl aide alleges a political cover-up by Tammy Baldwin

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FULL REPORT

Former Baldwin and Kohl Aide Alleges A Political Cover-Up By Tammy Baldwin

Brookfield, Wis. — After firing her deputy state director and offering her a taxpayer-funded settlement to remain quiet, an ethics complaint was filed against Senator Tammy Baldwin.

While the complaint was dismissed, Marquette Baylor, a top aide to Senator Baldwin and Senator Kohl, clearly believed there was a political cover-up by Senator Baldwin and her office.

“Marquette Baylor was a top aide to Senator Baldwin who, according to Ms. Baylor, Baldwin blamed for failing to address the crisis at Tomah,” said Leah Vukmir campaign manager Jess Ward. **“Wisconsin voters should read Marquette Baylor’s full report and judge for themselves if Senator Baldwin is responsible for letting our veterans down at Tomah.”**

BACKGROUND ...

United States Senate Select Committee On Ethics

The Complaint of Marquette Baylor against Senator Tammy Baldwin

April 20, 2015

I, Marquette Baylor, bring this Ethics Complaint against my former employer, Senator Tammy Baldwin, for making false statements and representations to cover up actions by her Chief of Staff and protect her political career. In support of this Ethics Complaint, I hereby state as follows:

Introduction

1. In late January, 2015, the public learned that Senator Tammy Baldwin's office had obtained an inspection report from the Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General ("VA OIG") concerning alleged overmedication and abuse at the VA hospital in Tomah, Wisconsin. The public also learned that Senator Baldwin and her senior aides did nothing to protect Wisconsin veterans from the danger and abuse detailed in the report.
2. After the public outcry, Senator Baldwin immediately sought to place the blame squarely on me. She instructed her Chief of Staff, Bill Murat, to fly to Milwaukee, fire me, and offer me a severance package that required me to stay quiet. Murat then moved into damage control, meeting with individuals in Wisconsin and telling them that the inaction was my fault. When I rejected the severance package, Senator Baldwin revised her plan. She hired a high-powered law firm, paid that firm to prepare an internal report for her – at no point requesting to interview me or ask me questions – and used that report to further deflect blame toward me while protecting those truly at fault.
3. As further detailed in the following sections, in August of 2014, constituent services representatives ("caseworkers") in the Milwaukee office identified broad-scale misconduct in multiple VA Medical Centers. At my direction, a caseworker elevated the VA misconduct issue directly to the State Director, Doug Hill, and the Legislative Director, Daniel McCarthy. Months passed without critical guidance. Later, in November of 2014, I was informed of the VA OIG report regarding the over-prescription practices at the Tomah VA Medical Center. My staff and I immediately developed an action plan and sought approval from Hill, the State Director, and Murat, the Chief of Staff. Despite repeated requests for approval of the proposed action plan, our efforts were rejected by Murat. My staff and I eventually prepared memorandums directed to the Senator herself. These memorandums were either ignored by the Senator or were withheld from her by Murat.
4. Senator Baldwin and her staff have disparaged the truth in order to cover up Murat's actions and to protect her political career. Had Murat, as the Chief of Staff, allowed me and other individuals to properly perform our roles, the issues surrounding the Tomah VA Medical Center would have been identified and addressed long ago. By attempting to place the blame at my feet, Senator Baldwin has concealed the truth, made false statements, and mischaracterized my service as the Deputy State Director. Her actions to cover up Murat's willful misconduct are unbecoming of a United States Senator. She has acted unethically.
5. I make these allegations with reluctance. With over a decade of public service and loyalty to policymakers and constituents in Wisconsin, I am reluctant to challenge a United States Senator. I am also reluctant to enter the spotlight, knowing that my actions will be viewed critically, and in hindsight. But given the events in recent months – the misinformation campaign designed to protect the Senator and her Chief of Staff – this reluctance must yield. It must yield to defend my name and reputation from unjustified attack. And it must yield to bring focus to where it should have been all along: the veterans who receive care by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.

Background

6. Respondent Tammy Baldwin is a junior United States Senator for the State of Wisconsin. As a member of the United States Senate, Senator Baldwin represents constituents in Wisconsin and is responsible for ensuring that their concerns and issues are handled. Senator Baldwin must also act ethically and in accordance with the Senate Code of Official Conduct, the rules and regulations of the United States Senate, and applicable state and federal laws.
7. During the relevant period, Senator Baldwin's Chief of Staff was (and continues to be) Bill Murat, and her State Director was Doug Hill.
8. I have lived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin since November of 1996. Prior to my work for Senator Baldwin, I worked for former United States Senator Herb Kohl for more than ten years. During that time, I performed my role with distinction and without any incident or question into my skill or work ethic as an employee. Senator Kohl occupied the seat now occupied by Senator Baldwin.
9. **My Role as Deputy State Director for Senator Baldwin**
I began work for Senator Baldwin as a Deputy State Director in June of 2013. In that role, I generally assisted the State Director with various oversight tasks in the Senator's Milwaukee Office. A substantial portion of my time was committed to building relationships with community leaders, creating a presence for the Senator in Milwaukee, and relocating the entire Milwaukee office operation.
10. Shortly after assuming the role of Deputy State Director, I immediately encountered communication, personnel, and transition difficulties between and within Senator Baldwin's various offices. These difficulties arose from the overall lack of office structure and protocols, unstated and changing job responsibilities, and the lack of standard operating procedures and training for the staff. The absence of basic standard operating procedures, as well as restrictions imposed by Murat that limited my ability to create or implement essential policies and procedures, significantly inhibited the staff's daily operations.
11. The absence of defined policies and the inability to create policies stood in stark contrast to my experience working for Senator Kohl. My immediate goal, therefore, was to establish my authority to create policies or, alternatively, obtain guidance on what specific policies should be implemented. Despite explicit requests to my supervisors, Murat and Hill, no authority or guidance was provided until November 5, 2014.
12. Without specific guidance from my supervisors, I instructed the caseworkers to act as advocates for constituents: heed their concerns, investigate their complaints, inquire into solutions, and take necessary steps to resolve their issues. The state constituent services function group consisted of five caseworkers, one of which was part-time and located in the Madison office. The three caseworkers with the heaviest caseloads handled immigration, social security, Medicare, and VA issues. Those three workers averaged approximately 120 to 150 open cases on a weekly basis.
13. Because of my significant responsibilities to develop and maintain relationships outside of the office, I instructed caseworkers to elevate problematic cases to my attention based on their professional judgment. In addition to cases brought to my attention, I would provide a weekly constituent services report to all staff highlighting trending issues of concern, impactful stories, and cases that required legislative action, along with the number of cases opened, closed, and pending.
- On January 21, 2014, Hill, the State Director, informed me that my position was being changed to Deputy State Director of Constituent Services. In an email to me and Todd Crouch, another Deputy State Director, Hill stated that the "basis for this reorganization comes in large part from . . . the important input that you have shared with Bill and me over the last year. I know that there has been frustration at times on not having a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities and reporting structure."
I embraced the change to Deputy State Director of Constituent Services because it would more directly focus my strength and expertise from my previous experience under Senator Kohl. My role as the new casework supervisor for Senator Baldwin required leadership, organization, and openness in order to respond to and assist constituents from all 72 counties. The constituent services function group met twice monthly through August, 2014, and monthly thereafter to discuss cases in general, plan solutions for addressing constituent concerns, and address any longstanding cases.
16. Despite the change in organizational structure, I continued to lack authority to create and implement much-needed policies and did not otherwise receive operating procedures from Hill or Murat for nearly ten months.
17. On November 6, 2014, based on my longstanding requests for clearly defined expectations and the authority to fulfill those expectations, I met with Hill and Murat by video teleconference to discuss my specific functions and handling of the team I had been assigned. In the meeting, which lasted approximately an hour, Murat indicated that he would like case listings to be reported to him in a different format. Given the brevity of the meeting, however, no standard operating procedures on the handling of cases could be established.
18. Only after the discovery of the VA OIG report did Hill and Murat entertain my input with regard to parameters on how caseworkers should handle constituent requests. Hill and Murat specifically granted me authority to establish protocols during a meeting on November 19, 2014. During the meeting, Murat indicated that caseworkers should not be contacting federal agencies, noting that Senator Baldwin had never made a Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA") request in 20 years.
19. The guidance finally obtained in November, 2014, was too late and could not compensate for severe short-fallings by Murat, the Chief of Staff. Indeed, despite the lack of clear job responsibilities and the significant limitations placed on my ability to manage caseworkers, the constituent services team identified and elevated issues concerning VA misconduct many months before any action was taken. These efforts were rebuffed by Murat until it was too late.