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CETA workers forced to campaign, give money to Rutherford

by Michael Moore

Employees of the Mayor James Rutherford Youth Center have disclosed to the *Flint Voice* that they have been coerced into performing various illegal campaign activities in the re-election effort of Mayor James Rutherford.

Bill Holbeck, spokesperson for the six CETA-funded "youth counselors," claims that they were, on a series of occasions, told to perform various functions that are illegal under the CETA regulations, Hatch Act, and various campaign laws.

The incidents include:

- On Friday, June 8, the eight counselors, the secretary, and the job coordinator of the Rutherford Youth Center were told that they were to go door to door distributing Rutherford campaign literature to all homes within an area bounded by Detroit St. on the east, Dupont on the west, Welch on the south and Dayton on the north. After two hours of campaigning, the employees were told they could have the afternoon off although they were paid by CETA for the day;

- In April of this year, each of the employees of the Center were told they were to buy a \$25 ticket to a re-election birthday party for Mayor Rutherford at the I.M.A. When they protested, they were told that they shouldn't forget that if it wasn't for Mayor Rutherford, they wouldn't have their jobs;

- Three of the counselors were told to put Rutherford bumper stickers on their cars. They refused.

In addition to these campaign activities, the counselors also contend that, although they are told they must be present in the building between 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. in case someone from CETA comes by, they have never seen anyone from the CETA program come over to the Center to see if they were doing their job.

The Mayor James Rutherford Youth Center, located on the corner of Detroit and Green, provides one-to-one counseling by probate court. Opened in June of 1978 by the City of Flint's Human Relations Commission, the Center employs eight counselors and a secretary all funded through the

Federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). The Reverend Sidney Edwards has been the Center's director (he ended his tenure at the Center on August 31).

Holbeck claims that his constant criticism of the "mismanagement" of the Center plus his objections to being forced to take money out of his CETA paycheck for Rutherford's campaign, led to his recent dismissal. Four other counselors have quit and others have been fired for various reasons ranging from insubordination and "poor job performance" to making it known to the staff and clients "that she was gay."

Mattie Fordham, the Rutherford-appointed director of the Flint Human Relations Commission, denies most of the allegations about the counselors being forced to campaign for Rutherford on CETA-funded time.

"Forced? What do you mean forced? I asked them to campaign for the Mayor," Ms. Fordham told the *Voice*. "As a matter of fact, I took a paid holiday and went with them."

Ms. Fordham admitted that they went door-to-door for Rutherford on a

Friday morning and gave the counselors the afternoon off. She said they made up the time on another day.

Pay stubs, though, provided by the counselors to the *Voice* show that they were, in fact, paid for the day they distributed literature for Rutherford. Fordham accused Holbeck (whom she kept referring to as "Hollenbeck") of being "a liar right straight down the line" and claimed that he was exposing this in retaliation for being fired.

Fordham also denied forcing the employees of the Rutherford Youth Center to give \$25 out of their CETA paycheck to the re-election/birthday party for the Mayor.

"Absolutely not—I asked them, like I do all my employees every year. This thing just didn't start with them this year—this is a traditional thing. We all buy tickets because we support the Mayor."

She also denied coercing any of the employees to put a Rutherford bumper sticker on their car.

"'Forced' and 'coerced' are two words that are not even a part of my vocabulary."

Devere Bolden, an assistant to Mattie Fordham at the Human Relations Commission, was put on the phone by Ms. Fordham and told the *Voice* that everything she said was substantially true. He did admit, however, that "when your boss 'asks' you to do something, you might interpret it as a direct order."

Ms. Fordham then got back on the phone and warned the *Voice* that "you better have sworn depositions for everything you say because I'm going to retain an attorney and take you and Hollenbeck to court if you print this garbage."

Then she added: "Remember, if I have done anything wrong, it's only because I love Flint and I love those kids (at the Center)."

Mattie's love, though, did not last long. After being interviewed by the *Voice*, Ms. Fordham immediately called all of the counselors down to her office at City Hall and demanded that they sign an affidavit stating that they voluntarily campaigned for Rutherford on June 8. The counselors, though,

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