

1:24pm

Marty: OK, Gracie, thank you for meeting with me today. My name is Martha Lemert. Umm, written complaints have been filed with the county human resources department concerning Commissioner Chuck Poling and the manner in which he interacts with others in the county government workplace. I am an attorney and outside investigator engaged at the direction of Commissioner Shane Middlesworth and Commissioner Ron Stewart in consultation with the county legal department to investigate those written complaints and other related allegations involving Commissioner Poling. You are one of approximately 17 county employees currently identified as potentially having information that may be relevant to this investigation. Information provided by you and others may become public at some point, including the allegations involving Commissioner Poling, if they are determined to be credible or if disclosure is otherwise advisable or required by law. As part of this investigation, Commissioner Poling will be given an opportunity to be interviewed and to respond to the allegations. You are not the subject of this investigation; Commissioner Poling is the subject of this investigation, and you are being interviewed as a potential witness. The county asks that you be honest, candid, cooperative, and transparent in the information that you provide. Your employer is prohibited by law from retaliating against you for providing testimony, information, or evidence in connection with this investigation. If after this interview you believe you are experiencing retaliation, please notify the county human resources director who will inform the county legal department. Commissioner Poling will be instructed not to contact you regarding your testimony today. If Commissioner Poling contacts you regarding your testimony, please notify the county human resources director who will inform the county legal department. This interview is being conducted during normal business hours and as part of your work for the county, you will be paid your normal wages for this time. When possible, it would be helpful—it is helpful—for you to be as specific as you can be regarding dates, times, locations, people present, that kind of thing, and what occurred. It's also understandable if you don't remember every detail today or as we speak here. If at some point in the future you obtain or recall additional information, testimony, or documentation you believe may be relevant to the investigation, you may contact me by email or phone to provide that information. This interview is being recorded so I can prepare the most accurate recording possible—report possible. Today's date and time are July 29th of 2026, and it's approximately 1:24 PM. Can you state your name and the position that you hold with the county?

Gracie Johnson: My name is Gracie Johnson, and currently I just got a job in the clerk's office, Superior Court 3 deputy.

Marty: And you are—how long have you worked for the county, overall?

Gracie Johnson: Since November of 2024.

Marty: And how long have you been in the clerk's office?

Gracie Johnson: This will—this is my second week.

Marty: OK. Have you observed or experienced any conduct by Commissioner Poling in the county government workplace that you believe might have been unlawful and questionable, intimidating, or inappropriate?

Gracie Johnson: Yes.

Marty: Can you describe that for me?

Gracie Johnson: Yes. Can I check my calendar real fast?

Marty: Sure.

Gracie Johnson: I'm pretty sure it was the 9th when this happened. Yes, it was my last day there. I had heard rumors before that Chuck and my old boss were—I put my two weeks in, which shouldn't be something that you should have to worry about something happening for doing—they were, I heard rumor that they were gonna try to find a way to terminate me so that I couldn't get my new job where I am now.

Marty: Where was your old job?

Gracie Johnson: The treasurer's office.

Marty: OK. And you put your two weeks' notice in?

Gracie Johnson: I ended up leaving sooner than my two week notice because I had fear that they were going to try to do something behind the scenes, depend on me, when I—I haven't done anything wrong, I don't have no background, I have no theft, nothing like that, so I didn't want to stay around long enough for them to find—do something, you know what I mean.

Marty: OK. So you didn't work out the full 2 weeks' notice due to concerns about their concerns to...

Gracie Johnson:yes...

Marty:to try and fire you....

Gracie Johnson:I talked to HR and everything and we all came to an agreement that that was probably the safest option for me.

Marty: Well, what interaction specifically did you have with Commissioner Poling regarding all of this?

Gracie Johnson: So my old boss, he came in to speak with her that morning around, I would say, between 8:30 and 9:00. They went back to...

Marty: and your old boss being....

Gracie Johnson: April Laguerre...

Marty: the treasurer....

Gracie Johnson: uh huh.. They went back to the break room, which is away from the camera, and they had a conversation back there.

Marty: And was this after you gave your notice?

Gracie Johnson: Uh huh. Yes. And he came back up to where the front, where we were sitting at our desk, and he motioned with his finger for me to come with him, so I got up. come with him so I got up.....

Marty: and did you feel like you needed to respond to that?

Gracie Johnson: I got up and went but I didn't know in the moment that my boss wasn't gonna be present so.....

Marty: so you thought he was signaling you, you thought he was signaling you on behalf of of April.....

Gracie Johnson: but my thinking was I was going to talk with both of them, which if I would have done it over again, knowing that it was just him, I would have said I wanted HR present or my boss present or something. But he, I walked up to him in off camera view, he put his arm around me and he said we're gonna go have a talk. Then he took me back to the break room.

Marty: Did you feel like you had to go?

Gracie Johnson: Yeah

Marty: I mean he physically had his arm around you ...

Gracie Johnson: ...he made me walk with him the whole time and then he took me back to the break room in the office.

Marty: Did anybody see that other than yourself/

Gracie Johnson: Yes.

Marty: Who else would have observed that/

Gracie Johnson: Yes, there were two ladies from an upper company in the county called Lao. They do training in the office and stuff and then other girl who worked in there with me she was sitting there at her desk as well.

Marty: And what's her name ?

Gracie Johnson: Morgan.

Marty: Morgan. And they would have observed him putting his arm around you and ushering you into ...

Gracie Johnson: I would think so yeah

Marty:the the break room...

Gracie Johnson: they at least know that he took me back there yeah.

Marty: ...yeah. Did did the break room have anybody in it?

Gracie Johnson: It was just me and him.

Marty: Did the break room, was there a door to the break room? Did he close a door?

Gracie Johnson: no.

Marty: OK what happened next?

Gracie Johnson: He sat there with me and he first started trying to fish out of me where my new job was and all I said to him was over there just pointing across the street didn't I wasn't trying to go into detail about it with him and he kept pushing and well what office what job blah blah blah and I was like why.....

Marty: why do you need to know that ?

Gracie Johnson: yeah...

Marty: right ...

Gracie Johnson: ... and he said well if it's the clerk's office, I know that there's no job open over there it hasn't been approved by the council, which I know for a fact is not true it was approved in I think March and the job was open so ...

Marty: ... right, was the job a posted job that you applied for?

Gracie Johnson: Yeah, I applied for it on the county website so the whole time I'm just feeling like you guys think I'm stupid enough to try to convince me to change my mind and not leave and then he was trying to offer me more money and I'm telling him no it's not worth it to me I'm not happy here I don't feel...

Marty: what did he say regarding that-- did he did he specifically name a number or did he ...

Gracie Johnson: .. no, he said I think he mentioned well even if it was more money than what you're making over there and I told him it's not worth it to me, and he said oh so it's the way you're being treated then, and I said yeah I'm not happy I don't feel appreciated in this office. And he said well what if I can change that, and I don't know what that was supposed to mean but I didn't answer. I just I wasn't gonna feed his ego you know what I mean.

Marty: And what was his tone... how far away was he from you when this conversation happened/

Gracie Johnson: Probably closer than me and you

Marty: OK and we're about 5 feet apart about...

Gracie Johnson: ... about this clos...

Marty: ... about 2 or 3 feet away from you...

Gracie Johnson: ... we're sitting at a square table and he was sitting about like right here....

Marty: on one corner and you were on the other...

Gracie Johnson: Uh huh....

Marty: OK and no one else was in the break room?

Gracie Johnson: no

Marty: OK did you feel free to leave at that point?

Gracie Johnson: I could've yeah, but I didn't

Marty: I mean this was a commissioner right...

Gracie Johnson: Yes...

Marty: so did you think this person had any sway over your job...

Gracie Johnson: ... yeah I don't know look the full -- you know what I mean -- I think everybody's scared of something happening -- just things that I've heard about him. I'd be scared to stick up to him or anything 'cause I'd be scared he would try to pull strings.

Marty: What, what tone of voice did he have with you?

Gracie Johnson: He was being nice but -- what's the word I'm looking forI can't think of the word I'm looking for it was very intimidating though, not his tone necessarily just things he was saying. He told me 'cause Mike Scott is rumored to take position of clerk when Pam leaves and he's like well me and Mike Scott are close and if he ends up getting in, he might get rid of you and I'm like so HR had me put that in writing in case that does happen, I'm scared now that I'm a target for some reason, when I haven't done anything wrong.

Marty: What is your, and so your position is what level position is it over at the clerk's office?

Gracie Johnson: I'm probably, the in my bookkeeping department, the lowest as of right now.

Marty: So you're not in a policy making role or anything like that?

Gracie Johnson: No

Marty: OK so did you think he was intimating that you know once Scott got in there that you, your job was in jeopardy?

Gracie Johnson: It very well could be, yeah... it wouldn't surprise me.

Marty: And how long did this conversation last?

Gracie Johnson: I'd say maybe about 10 minutes maybe a little less, but about that long yeah.

Marty: Was this during this is during the work day?

Gracie Johnson: Uh huh. I'd say it was a little bit before 9:00 that morning.

Marty: OK and do you remember what day it was?

Gracie Johnson: It was the 9th ...

Marty: ...the 9th of July OK...

Gracie Johnson: yeah that was my last day in that office.

Marty: And you ended up, you did end up taking the job in the recorder's office correct?

Gracie Johnson: The clerk's...

Marty: ... I mean the clerk's office.

Gracie Johnson: I already had the job yeah.

Marty: And now you're in that job, has any, has Commissioner Poling had any other further contact with you directly since then?

Gracie Johnson: No.

Marty: Did you have any follow up or communication with the treasurer April regarding Commissioner Poling's talking to you in the break room?

Gracie Johnson: No, she, I gave my notice that Monday of that week, I'm not sure exactly what day that was Thursday it was the 9th, but and from then until the 9th, she never once acknowledged to me that I gave my notice OK. She would talk to other people about it...

Marty: ... but not you...

Gracie Johnson: ... she would say things but never once she never responded to any of my emails that I sent her, asked like sending her all my notes and everything, asking if she needed anything else from me, what I needed to do to help make their life easier. She never once...

Marty: did any of that...

Gracie Johnson: ... acknowledged me, but and then after that conversation with Chuck, she was walking around with the handbook and taking personal phone calls in separate rooms away from the camera and it just made me feel very anxious, and it felt like something was being plotted against me, and I just don't understand it because I was a good employee, whether I went to the courthouse or not I was still gonna leave so I try to ruin that for me. I don't, they've gotten, her and Chuck have gotten close enough now that it, it makes me nervous.

Marty: Would you see Commissioner Poling in there a lot in the treasurer's office?

Gracie Johnson: Yes, yeah.

Marty: How frequently would he be there?

Gracie Johnson: Maybe at least once a week but more frequently than the other commissioners for sure. If she needed something, he was always, and they always went talked privately...

Marty: in the back office.

Gracie Johnson: Uh huh.

Marty: Are there any cameras back there?

Gracie Johnson: Huh uh, the only camera in the office is right in front of the counter, which I think that's on purpose for them to make sure they're not talking in camera view, if you know what I mean. I think that was the whole reason he pulled me back there was that ...

Marty:he knew the cameras weren't there.

Gracie Johnson: Yeah.

Marty: Do you, did you talk to anybody about this communication with Commissioner Poling, where he tried to get you to stay?

Gracie Johnson: With HR.

Marty: With HR. Did you talk to them that same day?

Gracie Johnson: Yeah.

Marty: ... or was it OK. And has anything occurred since then involving Commissioner Poling that you believe is inappropriate ...

Gracie Johnson:towards me

Marty:towards you?

Gracie Johnson: No.

Marty: Have , do you feel like you've been, there's been any attempt to retaliate against you since leaving the treasurer's office?

Gracie Johnson: With Chuck?

Marty: With Commissioner Poling or your former boss?

Gracie Johnson: She did I think send the clerk an email trying to say things about me not working my two weeks or something like that but my boss understands me and HR have sat down and made sure in the handbook I was gonna be OK, you know what I mean.

Marty: Right, Ok.

Gracie Johnson: I think both of them are just grasping for straws.

Marty: And you you think that they were they, they tried to make that argument in order to deep, you know to jeopardize your new role?

Gracie Johnson: Yeah, they did it when another girl that left the office, they were trying to say that she stole notes and I know she didn't. She knows she didn't.

Marty: And who was that employee?

Gracie Johnson: Delaney.

Marty: OK and what tell me about that, what you know about that situation.

Gracie Johnson: They were trying, I know she hadApril had spoken to Chuck about it and saying she took notes and Chuck was trying to say that if she did take notes, that they could fire her on the spot for it and everything like that and I just I don't understand it she's gone, regardless so why are you trying to ruin somebody's job for your benefit.

Marty: Did Delaney when she leave, leave notes or or ...

Gracie Johnson: ... I don't think so.....

Marty: ...materials for you.

Gracie Johnson: Oh I'm sorry.

Marty: Did she leave notes...

Gracie Johnson: Yes...

Marty: or materials for people left in the treasurer department?

Gracie Johnson: Yes, yes, she did. She had her entire computer, everything a hard drive on it everything so I don't understand that saying there wasn't anything left.

Marty: But but based on that you felt that they would go after somebody for leaving for anything...

Gracie Johnson: that they could anything that they could come up with.

Marty: Are you aware of any other situations or been involved in any other situations involving Commissioner Poling?

Gracie Johnson: I've heard of other things but this is the only thing that that...

Marty: you have personal OK. What else have you heard about involving Commissioner Poling?

Gracie Johnson: I've heard about him going into the clerk's office and having her by herself, getting angry with her and in her face. I've heard about him having HR in their face, screaming at them, backed into a corner. I've heard about multiple, yeah. It sounds like he's very known to get a temper and be in personal space that he shouldn't be in.

Marty: Did you, when he was talking to you in the break room you mentioned you were only a few feet away from him. Was he sitting or standing at that point?

Gracie Johnson: Sitting.

Marty: OK did he, and you mentioned that you felt intimidated because of the, what he was saying, not necessarily his tone of voice...

Gracie Johnson: ... yes...

Marty: Has he, have you ever observed him kind of talking about his power or or you know, trying to communicate to people how much power he has in the in the county?

Gracie Johnson: yeah, I can't think of a perfect example off the top of my head, but yeah and I've seen him have a temper before too, not at me but.....

Marty: at someone else? Can you tell me about that?

Gracie Johnson: He wasn't mad at April but he was mad in general and they went into her office which I couldn't hear but there's glass there and he was very close to her yelling and I couldn't hear what he was saying but you could tell by his demeanor.....

Marty: that he was angry....

Gracie Johnson: uh huh..... and he was in her face and afterwards I was like was, was he yelling at you? Because what I was saying was like Oh my gosh, he's screaming at her in her face, and she was like no he wasn't mad at me, he's just mad in general. I think it was, I think it was honestly after everything that went down with Pam in the clerk's office. I think it might have been that same day. He was all fired up after that and the sheriff walking him out and everything and being mad about that I think he was still fired up and came over that day.

Marty: And when do you think that was-- how how long before you left the treasurer's area?

Gracie Johnson: I would say it was maybe last year -- like middle to the end of the year, its been awhile since that happened.

Marty: Have you ever observed him appearing to be under the influence of any drugs or alcohol or anything or?

Gracie Johnson: Huh uh.

Marty: OK do you do you believe anyone's tried to intimidate you on behalf of Commissioner Poling, as in somebody else working for the county or anybody else?

Gracie Johnson: Huh uh.

Marty: OK other than him, at that time he put his arm around you, have you had him, the experience of him entering your physical space or physically touching you in any way?

Gracie Johnson: I meant, he put his arm around me again when we walked out, I forgot to say that....

Marty: ... oh OK...

Gracie Johnson: he did put his arm around me again when he, when he walked me out of the break room back into the area.

Marty: OK, and so it was twice that he did that all in the same moment.

Gracie Johnson: Uh huh.

Marty: And you were concerned enough to go up to HR immediately?

Gracie Johnson: Yeah I felt I sat down with my coworker and the other two people and Morgan, she said are you OK and I immediately started crying just because I felt so, like that did that just happen? Like I felt nervous, I'm like something is about to happen--- like I was just scared something was gonna happen to me afterwards; like they were planning something you know what I mean.

Marty: That you were on their radar screen.

Gracie Johnson: Yeah for no reason.

Marty: Right for I'm like what did I do? ...

Gracie Johnson: really I did every like, by the book, I gave them notice. I provided you with everything you needed. I've been kind. I haven't thrown a fit. I just.

Marty: Have you experienced any finger pointing poking or spitting by Commissioner Poling?

Gracie Johnson: Not, no.

Marty: And you indicated the break room was open, but did you feel comfortable to just leave at that point when he was talking to you?

Gracie Johnson: I probably could have yes but I was so in the moment, you know, I'm like right I was kind of in shock at that moment ...

Marty: ... you were in shock.....

Gracie Johnson: and I'm thinking of things right now too. He was also talking about the two week thing to me too, trying to say the handbook is so vague that HR was like, we're using this to our benefit-- it says nothing about not working out it-- just says you cannot be rehired in the county if you do not give a notice, and I did give a notice. I did what I was supposed to do, and he was trying to tell me, hey, you need to at least work your two weeks or you're not gonna be able to get that job over there basically, you can't get a job in the county again. And I told him I'm like, I have the job. I have a start day. I know my salary, like I don't understand why you keep trying to defer me and he kept kind of going on saying you need to stay, you need to stay and work your two weeks, and I told him I was like I have my mind made-up. I made a decision. I'm not happy here and I'm fine. I told him, I'm fine. If I have consequences or whatever I no, I didn't say that to him, but my new boss has got me 'cause obviously my current one doesn't so...

Marty:and and that was kind of what you were thinking in your mind at the at the moment ...

Gracie Johnson: yeah.

Marty: So it sounds like you weren't, you really weren't trusting what they were saying to you...

Gracie Johnson: ... no it was very manipulative, you know what I mean, it was like-- do you guys think I'm stupid enough to know that all of the stuff that you're telling me is...

Marty: like the job wasn't posted ...

Gracie Johnson: ...right...

Marty:and they are making up things to try to scare me being like, whoa, hey you can't go over there-- that job's not open you just stay right here.

Marty: Did you feel it was coercive?

Gracie Johnson: Yes

Marty: OK. Did Commissioner Poling's conduct impact your ability to work?

Gracie Johnson: Like what happened that day?

Marty: Yeah

Gracie Johnson: I was very...

Marty: ... shaken...

Gracie Johnson: very anxious and on edge of the rest of that day, constantly felt like things were going on in the background, you know what I mean, like something was being conspired in the background.

Marty: Does that impact your ability to concentrate?

Gracie Johnson: Oh yeah that...

Marty: and what you're doing?

Gracie Johnson: ...that last day was terrible. The whole day I was just sitting there, like I'm so ready to go home and be done with this place, and I just felt like there was no way I could have went back there after that day and felt safe or like not necessarily physically safe but ...

Marty:but reputationally safe

Gracie Johnson:yes yes...

Marty: OK did how would you characterize Commissioner Poling's presence, be and its impact on the work environment within county government?

Gracie Johnson: He's very-- I feel like he it's like a light switch sometimes. Like he'll go from being cool to fired up, whether that's an angry way or just in general, you know what I mean, he's very kind of explosive at times and knowing his past and stuff you, people are just very eggshell with him, you know what I mean, 'cause you don't want to say the wrong thing, make him blow up, you know what I mean, So I think a lot of people feel that way.

Marty: OK did you ever observe any let's strike that And you provided a written statement to HR and we have that correct?

Gracie Johnson: Yes.

Marty: Is there any other documentation or video evidence that you've, that you have regarding ...

Gracie Johnson: ... I don't think so ...unfortunately all this stuff was off camera ...

Marty: And you talked about the, the situation involving your other coworker, Delaney, is there othe,r other incidences that you're aware of involving Commissioner Poling towards anyone that you currently work with or anyone that had been in the treasurer's department that you would deem inappropriate?

Gracie Johnson: I don't think so over there no.

Marty: OK is there any anything else you'd like to share, any other information you believe we should know about that we're not aware of?

Gracie Johnson: I'm trying to think off the top of my head -- I think I think that was everything.

Marty: Did you have any concerns about the way the Treasury Department was running after April took over?

Gracie Johnson: Yeah I just feel like she can be very explosive as well and her mood is very based on how your day is going to go, and me and Morgan both were valued there. We worked really hard short people and it's just I had a promotion being held over my head for a long time with excuse after excuse.

Marty: And what was that promotion?

Gracie Johnson: To go full time. I was part time for a year and a half.

Marty: And were you, were you working part time hours or were you working more than that

Gracie Johnson: Well I learned from HR that I should have been offered benefits a long time before I quit because I was only supposed to be working 28 hours a week and she was working me well over that. She was working me more hours

Marty:and so even though you were you were scheduled for 28 hours they they were working you more than that and you should have been offered benefits ?

Gracie Johnson: uh huh. Yeah 'cause if you work over, I think 30 hours, the county is supposed to give you benefits so she was sitting with a position open and having me work full time hours...

Marty: and not giving you benefits, instead of putting you in that position...

Gracie Johnson: yeah extra workload extra hours but not a title or raise or anything like that, no benefits.

Marty: Had you asked about that promotion?

Gracie Johnson: Oh yeah...

Marty: Was that brought up at all by the by Commissioner Poling when he talked to you?

Gracie Johnson: Uh huh.

Marty: What what did he say about that?

Gracie Johnson: He said what if we can get you full time, and I told him it's not worth it to me.

Marty: No you're gonna just move to this other role.

Gracie Johnson: Right 'cause at least there I know for a fact that I'm gonna have benefits and 'cause I wasn't getting paid for holidays off. I had no sick. I had no vacation. If I missed work I had to go unpaid.

Marty: OK and this new opportunity was full time.

Gracie Johnson: Yes.

Marty: Are there other people who might have relevant information regarding this that we haven't talked about?

Gracie Johnson: Morgan probably, but she doesn't want to get in trouble ...

Marty:sure and she's still there in the treasurer's office?

Gracie Johnson:yeah she's just nervous about something coming back on, like I'm saying that wrong -- she's just scared of somebody getting mad at her for talking or

Marty:and getting in the crosshairs...

Gracie Johnson:Uh huh

Marty: OK is there any other relevant information you think I should know about?

Gracie Johnson: I think I covered everything really for now.

Marty: All right well like I said if you could think of something else you can reach out and and follow up with me I appreciate your time I'm going to end the interview now it's about 1:51 PM thank you.

1:51pm