

MISSION: DESTROY STACY HEAD

Contributed by Jeff Crouere
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What is it about New

Orleans Councilwoman Stacy Head that infuriates so many “activists” in New Orleans? Is it her insistence on accurate information and her intolerance for bureaucratic incompetence? Or is it her direct, no nonsense manner and confrontations with New Orleans Sanitation Director Veronica White?

Whatever the reason, she has

become an inviting political target. While the vast majority of people who have interacted with her have a high regard for how her office operates, Head had to endure a failed recall campaign. Despite strong support from many African American leaders in her district, Head has been unfairly labeled a racist.

Her latest opponent is lawyer and

activist Tracie Washington, who posted a few of Head’s e-mail communications on her group’s website. The stunt was designed to embarrass Head as much as possible and cause her significant political damage. It is too early to determine the political fallout for Head after the selective release of these inflammatory e-mails.

In the e-mails, Head complained

about the city’s incompetent technology chief, Anthony Jones, who lied about his credentials, but was still on the city payroll and receiving \$80,000 per year. She also blasted her council colleague Jackie Clarkson, community activist Jerome Smith and related an upsetting incident involving a “chick” using food stamps at a grocery store.

After posting the e-mails for

several hours, Washington removed them from her website. Washington released the e-mails even though the State Supreme Court blocked the distribution of the messages. The Supreme Court action came after the 4th Circuit Court of Appeal overruled District Court Judge Lloyd Medley and gave permission for Washington to release the 400,000 e-mails.

This whole episode is a rather

troubling insight into the racial politics of New Orleans. In her initial public records request, Washington only targeted white council members and did not solicit the e-mails of any of the African American council members. Washington secured the e-mails only through the cooperation of Veronica White, who despises Stacy Head. It is outrageous that the Sanitation Director would be involved in such a record request. For this offense, she should have been fired, but, sadly, White remains on the city payroll with her bloated salary.

The release circumvented the

procedure for handling public records requests. The city attorney's office was not informed until the e-mails had already been released. To make matters worse, Washington posted the e-mails despite the ruling of the State Supreme Court.

This whole situation is being examined by federal investigators who want to determine whether the e-mails were released improperly. Ms. White's computers have been seized and there could be more scandalous developments involving this case.

The real blame lies with the Nagin administration which failed to stop the improper release of these records. An activist looking to target Stacy Head should not have been allowed to receive 400,000 e-mails in a matter of hours.

In contrast, WWL-TV and other stations have been denied access to vital public records involving Mayor Nagin. Only portions of his calendar were initially released, as Nagin tried to redact information about his meetings with controversial politicians such as former State Senator Cleo Fields. Implausibly, Nagin's office deleted most of the Mayor's e-mails citing storage problems. This excuse is ridiculous since technology experts note that there are easy ways to deal with computer storage problems.

This case involves an administration that tried to hide any potential embarrassment for the Mayor, while simultaneously working with an activist to embarrass a political opponent. While the Mayor seems delighted that Head is undergoing scrutiny, hopefully, her constituents will not penalize her for some controversial e-mails, but will credit her for the outstanding job she has done representing her district.