

Madison County Chairman Kurt Prenzler Faces Questions At Board Meeting From State's Attorney

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE - The Madison County Board Executive Committee and State's Attorney Tom Haine had several questions for County Chairman Kurt Prenzler after a reported ethics violation.

While on county property and during work hours, Prenzler allegedly gave a political business card with his phone number handwritten on the card to a vendor. He also gave a card to an assistant state's attorney in a separate incident. Prenzler was found in violation by Ethics Advisor Bruce Mattea, based on concerns that he was electioneering on county time and property.

During the Executive Committee meeting on Jan. 17, 2024, Prenzler answered questions about both incidents. He said he took the card out of his wallet to give the vendor his phone number, not to campaign. He also pointed out that the vendor was not a Madison County voter.

"I really didn't think about it," Prenzler said. "I just pulled out something to write on, something small that I could give to him with my phone number on it. I will not do it again. I wish I had not done it, but that's what I did. I just pulled it out of my wallet."

State's Attorney Tom Haine asked if this was an apology, and Prenzler said yes. Prenzler said he has no recollection of the instance with the assistant state's attorney, but didn't deny that it might have happened. He also said that he still carries the cards with him, but reiterated that he "certainly won't distribute" the cards on county time or property going forward.

The violation was reported to Chairman Pro Tem Mick Madison, who referred the matter to Mattea. Haine also passed it on to the Illinois State Police and Illinois Attorney General, who ultimately concluded it did not constitute a criminal case.

"Mr. Mattea acted very fairly on this and impartially. I was a little worried what this might get into when it started, but I'm very happy with the process," Madison said.

He also noted that Mattea sent Prenzler a series of questions about the incidents and Prenzler failed to answer those questions in the two weeks he was given. When asked why he did not answer the questions, Prenzler said he thought he had more time before the deadline.

During the meeting, Haine clarified that "there was never any criminal investigation" and that he passed the matter to the State Police and Illinois Attorney General because he believed he had a conflict of interest. By referring to the State Police and Attorney General, he aimed "to get a completely unbiased review of whether or not there's even a need to go into a criminal investigation."

“They made what I believe is the correct assessment. There’s no need to do a criminal investigation, so there was never any involvement of criminal investigative agencies or any involvement of the criminal justice system at all in this case,” Haine said.

Haine noted that he took “personal offense” at an earlier comment from Prenzler in which Prenzler said the case was a “weaponization of our local criminal justice system.”

“As I just stated, the criminal justice system was not involved in this at all, and when you make claims of bias without any basis in fact, it undermines people’s ability to believe that their local justice system is fair,” Haine said. “And I think that’s inappropriate, and I think that local law enforcement would think that’s inappropriate, and I think local prosecutors and judges would think that’s inappropriate. Nothing about this case was at all involved in the criminal justice system, and your imputations otherwise are entirely inappropriate.”

Executive Committee members noted that this case might set a precedent for County employees in the future. Prenzler was asked how he would respond if one of his staff members had done the same thing.

“I would have to have looked at all the different circumstances,” Prenzler said. “I would just have to review all circumstances. For example, in this circumstance, the gentleman is from Ohio, I shared my number, I pulled out the card, and I wish I had not pulled out the card.”

Ultimately, the Executive Committee decided to defer this issue until next month’s Executive Committee meeting.