

April 18, 2016

News Release - For Immediate Release

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Civil Suit Filed In Smith County District Court Seeks Removal of County Judge Joel Baker

Fleming: *“A community is known for what it tolerates. We don’t want Smith County known as a place where elitist elected officials run roughshod over the people, acting as if the rule of law and commonly accepted rules of behavior don’t apply to the elected class.”*

Tyler, Texas – Grassroots America’s Executive Director JoAnn Fleming today announced that a civil suit aimed at removing Smith County Judge Joel P. Baker from office has been filed in the Smith County District Court rotating docket system.

Trey Trainor and Joe Nixon, partners with the law firm of Beirne, Maynard & Parsons, LLP, filed the “Petition for Removal.” The petition cites actions prompting the litigation as *“Unconstitutional Traffic Camera Agreement”* and *“Inappropriate “Sexting” During State Commission for Judicial Conduct Meetings.”* The cause of action also cites inappropriate sexting during county business hours and taxpayer funded out-of-town conferences.

Fleming said the legal action was necessary since Baker has refused to resign after KLTV aired an investigative report on March 14, 2016, presenting serious allegations that Judge Baker had displayed explicit sexual online behavior while conducting government business. The story of the judge’s involvement in a sexting relationship cited sources who turned over to KLTV 1,000 explicit social media messages between a woman and Baker’s personal social media page. The messages included nude photos and video of Baker. KLTV reported that time stamps on the Facebook messages, as well as dates on Baker’s hotel and travel documents, coincided with county business hours, taxpayer funded out-of-town conferences and judicial conduct hearings in Austin.

The sexting scandal comes at a time when there are active investigations into the Smith County Commissioners Court’s controversial traffic camera contract by the Texas Attorney General’s Office and the FBI. Fleming said the tipping point was reached with a third investigation into Baker’s conduct by the State Commission on Judicial Conduct.

Fleming concluded, “Judge Baker has demeaned his oath of office, severed the public trust, and made a mockery of his role of county judge, probate judge, chairman of the juvenile board, and overseer of mental health commitments. This unseemly abuse of taxpayer time and resources removes any vestige of respect. Since the People of Smith County have no other statutory remedy before the 2018 primary election, including no authority for a recall election, this civil suit for removal is our only solution.”

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