

THE PUTNAM PIT

[No bull]

Going where no dog has gone before and without a leash!

Putnam County's watchdog press

January 2000

And he only accepts cash!

Audit finds circuit court clerk's accounting system allowed untraceable changes

Records of thousands in illegal charges levied against prisoners by Lewis Coomer's office could have been changed

By GEOFF DAVIDIAN

Editor of *The Putnam Pit*

COKEVILLE, Tenn. [Dec. 7, 1999] – The office of Putnam County Circuit Court Clerk Lewis Coomer used computer software that allowed users to “make changes to previously processed accounting information, but provided no audit trail of these changes,” a state financial report says.

The internal control problems in Coomer’s office come on the heels of reports that prisoners doing state time in Putnam County Jail had so-called “jailer’s fees” added to their bills of costs at a time when the legislature had not authorized such charges.

See COOMER, p. 5

Editorial

It's Bradley by default

When you look at the political culture that produced Vice President Al Gore, it is clear that Bill Bradley should represent Democrats in next year’s presidential election.

Following are “highlights” involving Gore’s political cronies:

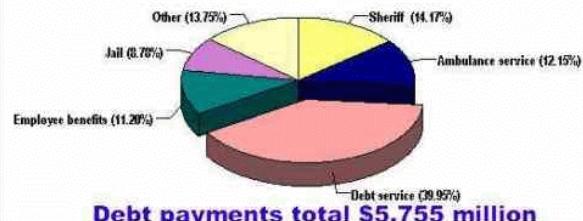
- ✓ Putnam County is in the judicial district known as the leading methamphetamine producing area in the state.
- ✓ The DA is a former cop whose grades were Ds through high school and was accepted into technical college as a “special case.”

See BRADLEY, p. 5

Putnam County's Debt Bomb

30% of tax rate goes to pay debt

1999-2000 general fund budget is \$14.411 million



Everyone was covering for Mike Gaw, ex-Cookeville cop says

Booze for the police chief, cash for the governor, p. 10

Cookeville Regional Medical Center trustee minutes, city and county budgets and other records will be online at

<http://www.putnampit.com>

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A night on the town with Bill Bradley

After eight years of Bill Clinton's high-school-drama-club empathy, preceded by 12 years of the socially dysfunctional Reagan and Bush, it's refreshing to see a politician who can actually have a conversation

By c.d. 'SONNY BOY' Norman
of *The Putnam Pit* staff

SOMERSWORTH, N. H. — Maplewood Elementary School is not difficult to find. This is a small town.

If you go too far in one direction, you're in the country; too far in the other direction and you're in Maine. I find the school by driving around at random for about 30 minutes. Maplewood Elementary is down the road from the high school, across the street from the cemetery.

It's 5:30 p.m., and the school gymnasium where in 90 minutes Bill Bradley will attend a town meeting is nearly empty. The only people in the gym are seven Bradley campaign workers and a Channel 9 news team set up in a corner.

Debbi Rodman, of Manchester station WMUR is "an award winning investigative reporter with a quest to uncover scandals and turn wrongs into rights." Tonight she and her cameraman have driven 60 miles to make a live, one-minute "tease" for the 6 p.m. newscast.

Rodman says, "Bill Bradley is under fire tonight from his chief opponent." I hear this astounding revelation over and over as Rodman rehearses. Earlier, while sitting in my car in the parking lot, I had seen Rodman in her van either practicing her lines or doing mouth-loosening exercises. She then spent several minutes brushing her already-perfect blond hair. Then she got out of the van and scratched her butt.

Rodman wants action in the background. She wants the campaign workers to look like they are working. And she wants them to be working behind her when she makes her live report. Apparently, she needs the activity to prove that she is actually at the Somersworth Town Meeting. Otherwise, she could be doing her "on-the-scene report" from the bar at the Holiday Inn.

Unfortunately, the work — which amounted to setting up the metal folding chairs and putting some campaign literature on tables — is long-finished. Rodman spots the campaign's sound guy, the fellow who plugged in the single microphone set up on the gym floor in front of the stage.

She has him stand behind her while he loops up a spare

cable. He finishes in about 15 seconds and Rodman is again left with an inactive background.

Now Rodman recruits a trio of girls — they look like middle school students — to stand behind her and tape "Bradley for President" signs to a wall. The girls are to sit in the folding chairs until Rodman gives them a signal, then spring into action. But when the live feed begins, Rodman forgets to cue the girls. As Rodman and her cameraman are packing up, a woman, probably the mother of one of the girls, approaches and asks if it's time for the girls to tape the signs to the wall.

See Bill. Bradley, page 3

Bill BRADLEY, from p. 2

People start to filter into the gym around 6:10 p.m.. A photographer sets up to the left of the stage. Two video cameras are positioned at the back of the room behind the chairs. A tall, silver-haired gentleman enters and is greeted loudly by the campaign workers: "Uncle Jim!"

A woman with the Manchester Chamber of Commerce notices me taking notes and comes over to ask if I'm a reporter. I tell her that I'm a cartoonist and give her some prints of "My Pal Al." She says that Gary Bauer called her office earlier, wanting to know "a good place where he could go to lunch and meet people."

At 6:30 p.m. there are 13 people sitting in the folding chairs, including the three girls who had been recruited to put up the signs. I listen to the campaign workers converse and learn that Uncle Jim is an Irish Catholic married to an English Protestant. A hyperactive man in a black-and-white tweed sport coat comes in and appears to ease the joint. A Secret Service agent wouldn't be caught dead in that coat, so I peg him as a local party official. Maybe the tax assessor.

The crowd starts to roll in as the sport coat exits. By 6:47 there are 45 people in the chairs. Eight chairs on the back row marked "Reserved for Press" are empty, but several men wearing suits and carrying little notepads are standing along the wall. One of the suits begins interviewing the man across the aisle from me. A man sitting near me says, "I'm just here because my brother told me to come."

Bradley arrives 12 minutes late by my watch. He has no "aura of greatness" or any other type of artificial lighting. You'd be hard pressed to label him "charismatic" or even "magnetic." But he looks great: tall, tanned, and relaxed.

Bradley tells a joke and makes a short speech. He says that the economic gains of the last decade have not been equally distributed among all citizens, a remark that trips the income redistribution alarm in my conservative brain.

Then he opens the floor to questions.

There is no attempt to screen the questions. That fellow in "Slingblade" could raise his hand and ask what Bradley would do fer the crim'nally insane um-hm. But after 23 visits to New Hampshire, Bradley has probably become adept at visually screening the obvious nut-cases. The questioners are unfailingly polite, and the questions are sincere and intelligent.

In return, Bradley gives sincere and intelligent answers. He is obviously

comfortable with the setting and with the people of New Hampshire.

After eight years of Bill Clinton's high-school-drama-club empathy, preceded by twelve years of the socially dysfunctional Reagan and Bush, it's refreshing to see a

Earlier, while sitting in my car in the parking lot, I had seen Rodman in her van either practicing her lines or doing mouth-loosening exercises. She then spent several minutes brushing her already-perfect blond hair. Then she got out of the van and scratched her butt

politician who can actually have a conversation. While Clinton speaks to the people, Bradley speaks with them.

Unfortunately, Bradley wants to speak with them about his legislative agenda. Almost every question leads to a lengthy description of a Proposal, Program, Plan, Act, or Bill that will "allow our children to have a better future than we do today."

Bradley, in my opinion, is a Liberal's liberal: a knob-twiddler whose road to salvation is paved with legislation. He has a proposed bill for every social ill and boundless faith in the curative powers of the Federal bureaucracy.

An older gentleman near the front rises and asks Bradley something along the lines of "Which campaign promises will you keep if elected." A tall suit, whose height rivals Bradley's, walks over from the side of the gym and asks Bradley to repeat the question.

Scribbling on the back of a campaign flyer, I record Bradley's response as . . .

Promises:

- (1) Cover 95% of citizens w/ health insurance
- (2) Reduce # of people in poverty
- (3) Fundamental campaign finance reform
- (4) Help working Americans manage change.
- (5) Manage the economy so that we cont. to maintain econ. growth
- Blah blah –
- 7 [crossed out] total
- (6) Continue to be at peace
- (7) Racial equality
- (8) Personal integrity and honesty that Americans expect

Foreign policy is an afterthought. The closest Bradley gets to a statement of foreign policy is his assurance that the country will "continue to be at peace." How do we insure a

long-lasting peace? Whack our enemies or buy them off? Engage in an expensive arms race, or sign unenforceable treaties? The dither is in the details and Bradley offers none. Show me a coherent plan for dealing with the French and I'll sit up and take notice.

With or without a foreign policy, I'll bet Bradley will do well if he makes it to the General Election, where the voting demographic will follow the usual pattern:

- ! 40% will vote for a bucket of warm spit if the bucket is a Democrat.
- ! 40% will vote for a bucket of warm spit if the bucket is a Republican.
- ! 10% will vote for the Democrat because the Republican is a grumpy old man.
- ! 10% will vote for the Reform Party whacko because they're whacko, too.

A young woman in the audience mentions that she was an AmeriCorps worker. Bradley invites her to describe her experiences. She gives an impassioned account of helping a group of inner city children plant a garden. She says that she "never felt so empowered" as when she was organizing and leading the group. Why do liberals gain so much satisfaction from running the lives of others?

Bradley says that he can't top that: in show business you should never follow a kid or an animal act. The meeting ends with a cheer by a group of grade-schoolers.

I try to pass out some "My Pal Al's" to the suits and campaign workers. Most react as if I'm trying to hand them a bomb.

Leaving the school, I pick up a campaign handout: a 4-by-17-inch card that a canvasser could attach to a door knob. According to the card, ". . . Bill Bradley will work on the big, unfinished business of America – providing access to health care for all Americans, promoting racial equity, improving our schools, reducing poverty that still affects one in four children, protecting our environment and restoring trust in our political system by eliminating big money from our campaigns."

Yep, that's six points.

Bill Bradley would probably chalk me up as a "moral victory." I don't agree with everything Bradley said, but he has connected with me as a person. I saw the man; I liked the man. He seemed honest and sincere. Although I'm a conservative, I would probably vote for Bill Bradley if he ran against a bucket of warm spit.

I get back in the car and drive around at random until I find the road back to Manchester. ☺

Point, counterpoint, counter-counterpoint [Is this healthy or what?]

On Aug. 3, 1999, the Herald-Citizen published this story:



Herald-Citizen

News
Sports
Lifestyles
Bulletin Board
Schools
NewsFeatures
Obituaries
Religion
Classifieds
Business

Need for hike in county taxes for new budget

Tracy LeFevere
Herald-Citizen Staff

Putnam Countians should expect to pay at least slightly higher property taxes this next year. That's because the county would most likely go in debt without one, say members of the County Commission's Budget Committee.

"I look at it like a transition. We've gone for as long as we possibly can without raising taxes, and it looks like we're going to have at least a small increase to build the budget back up," Budget Chairman Bill Rodgers said.

The committee became aware of the potential shortfall last week as its members studied various budgets proposed by county officeholders and included in the County General fund.

Need for hike in county taxes for new budget

"Putnam Countians should expect to pay at least slightly higher property taxes this next year. That's because the county would most likely go in debt without one, say members of the County Commission's Budget Committee."

The record shows

County budget has gone up 69% since 1994-'95

County's debt service is greater than property tax revenue for fifth consecutive year*

Fiscal year	General fund	School fund	Sheriff	Ambulance service	Debt service	Employee benefits	Jail	Property tax revenue
1994-'95	9.95	31.272	1.181	1.207	4.192	1.133	0.797	3.906
1995-'96	11.332	34.393	1.402	1.36	4.436	1.218	0.931	4.107
1996-'97	12.181	37.724	1.48	1.428	4.498	1.31	0.96	4.143
1997-'98	13.249	39.834	1.671	1.577	4.42	1.336	1.069	4.296
1998-'99	13.506	39.918	1.684	1.628	4.699	1.423	1.213	4.346
1999-'2000	14.411	41.655	2.042	1.751	5.755	1.613	1.265	5.129

*All except tax rate is in millions of dollars

Don't believe us. Don't believe them. Believe the public records we fight to provide you with

Geoff Davidian's take

With the help of Cookeville attorney Samuel J. Harris, *The Putnam Pit* has battled public officials in Cookeville and Putnam County for the records of their actions. City Mismanager Jimbo Shipley, with the help of Consigliori T. Michael O'Mara, has squandered \$100,000 fighting to keep records out of our hands. We've taken our fight to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, and we'll go to the U.S. Supreme Court to do what a newspaper has a responsibility to do: tell the truth about government. Read these pages and be assured that in the coming year *The Putnam Pit* will continue to fight The Big Lie put forward by the local advertising circular and the corrupt officials they carry water for. ☺

c.d. 'SONNY BOY' norman's take

I don't think the HC is being intentionally misleading this time. I think its more likely that they just aren't well-informed enough to use the correct terms. Instead of "debt" they should be using the term "deficit." Every municipal government goes into debt as soon as it issues bonds. And almost every incorporated municipal or county government devotes the majority of its tax revenue to "debt service" – the interest paid to the guy who bought the bond. The fact that most of their revenue goes to "debt service" isn't necessarily a sign of trouble or incompetence. That just means they are paying interest on bonds which were sold to build schools and roads and such: things that improve the quality of life, thereby attracting more people and business and thereby giving them the increased tax revenue needed to pay off the bond interest. It's true that expenditures have exceeded revenues, but that isn't necessarily bad. It just means that you have to dip into savings to cover the shortfall. In this case, "savings" is the General Fund. They obviously don't have a balanced budget, but they aren't officially into "deficit spending" until the General Fund shows a negative balance. When you attack the county for being "in debt" and say that the HC is misleading people by implying that the county isn't already in debt, I think that, at best, you cloud the issue and, at worst, you damage your own credibility because it comes across as if you really don't know what you're talking about. The county people are making excuses for having an unbalanced budget. They're saying things like, "We ran short because we couldn't hire a secretary for the jail so we couldn't contract to take other people's prisoners" and so on. THAT'S where the incompetence is! ☺

The Putnam Pit has posted Putnam County's 1999-2000 budget online at <http://www.putnampit.com/databases/gen99.htm>

COOMER, from p. 1

Altered indictment, suspicious software raise questions about Coomer's office

“Without an audit trail of data manipulation, errors and improper changes could occur and go undetected," according to the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for Putnam County covering the year ended June 30, 1998. The audit was conducted by the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury, Department of Audit, Division of County Audit.

The absence of adequate safeguards is a "reportable condition" under government auditing standards, which "involve matters coming to our attention relating to significant deficiencies in the design or operation of the internal control over financial reporting that, in our judgment, could adversely affect Putnam County's ability to record, process, summarize, and report financial data consistent with the assertions of management in the financial statements."

The county budget anticipates revenue of more than \$600,000 from Coomer's office this year, and he accepts only cash - no checks.

The audit does not look for culpability - it only provides an opinion about whether the county complies with requirements of the U.S. Office of Budget and Management to be eligible for certain federal programs and grants. It is up to county officials to correct deficiencies.

Tennessee authorities were poised to investigate Coomer's collection of jailer's fees two years ago after *The Putnam Pit* reported that Coomer was returning money to former prisoners who confronted him about the unlawful fees. But Richard V. Normant, assistant to the comptroller, said District Attorney General William

E. Gibson concluded the matter was civil, not criminal, and called off the inquiry. Meanwhile, County Executive Doug McBroom, himself criticized for purchasing goods without bids, said he did not identify the sources of money deposited in the county treasury by the clerk's office.

Gibson refused to be interviewed about the matter because in his opinion *The Putnam Pit* "is not objective."

General Sessions Judge John Hudson declined to look into possible illegal collection of the jailer's fees by Coomer, explaining it was not his responsibility although Coomer is also clerk of the General Sessions Court.

Coomer, who has acquired significant real estate holdings on his \$50,000 annual salary, stated that Sheriff Jerry Abston knew about the authority to collect jailer's fees for inmates serving state time in Putnam County, but Abston denied this.

In an unrelated incident, at least one indictment in Coomer's files was altered to include a second charge after the grand jury had refused to do so. One of the witnesses in that case was Coomer's employee Christy Roberts. Coomer and the employee called police on *The Pit* and its lawyer, Samuel J. Harris, who sought access to the altered documents under the state open records laws.

Cookeville police stormed Coomer's Justice Center office and demanded that Harris and *Pit* editor Geoff Davidian leave without the records, alleging they had caused a disturbance. However, when the officers learned Davidian and his lawyer had tape recorded the incident, they drove off in their squad car. 

BRADLEY, from p. 1

When you look at Gore's political roots, Bradley is the default candidate

- ✓ The police chief, Bob Terry, had been a sergeant when he was promoted to chief, and his promotion was over candidates with seemingly more integrity and perhaps more credentials, including a department lieutenant and a retired FBI agent.
- ✓ On the other hand, Former Chief Richard Holt was fired for blowing the whistle on corruption within the department.
- ✓ The city schemes to hide public records. For example, when *The Pit* reported that city hall workers were browsing to porno sites from government computers and we reported they browsed for thousands of hours based on invoices from the Internet provider, the city changed providers to one that did not monitor the time spent. Plus on the computers themselves, they set the browsers not to retain a history, denying the public the opportunity to monitor which Web
- ✓ sites were visited.
- ✓ More than 100 city employees take home cars, and only one of them is a woman.
- ✓ Seven of the 10 lowest paid city employees are women, while the 11 city employees making the most are men. Just one of the top 70 salaries goes to a woman.
- ✓ The DA brought murder charges against Byron (Low Tax) Looper, the unpopular Republican property assessor, in the shooting death of State Senator Tommy Burks, Looper's rival in a state election.

But when an informant came forward and signed an affidavit in which he swore the DA wanted him to set up Looper, the informant was committed to a psychiatric hospital -- driven there by the county sheriff against whom the informant had a pending federal civil rights case.

When we tried to read the informant's message to the city council, one member got

up and said he didn't want to hear anything bad about the DA and threatened to walk out.

THIS is the political culture Al Gore moved his campaign to. This is his source of political capital and this is where he will pay back those who helped him. In this issue of *The Putnam Pit* is a list of Cookeville contributors to the presidential candidates.

In our opinion, Bradley should use Cookeville as an example of the political character that spawned Albert Gore Jr. If nothing else, we wish the campaign would embarrass these public officials into running an honest local government.

But Gore has no control over them. THEY empower HIM. They contribute to him because they know he will allow them to continue.

So if you want accountability, it has to be Bradley.

**Geoff Davidian, editor
*The Putnam Pit***

Contributors to candidates by Cookeville zip code

Zip 38501			
Contributor	Date	Amount	Recipient
BELL, GLORIA A	03/31/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
BELL, JOHN R	03/31/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
BELL, ROBERT R	03/31/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
BERTRAM, PHILLIP D	02/20/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
BOYD, KENNETH D MR	08/30/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
BROWN, RAYMOND MRS	07/23/1999	\$250	Alexander, Lamar
DELOZIER, MARY JEAN MRS	06/22/1999	\$300	Gore, Al
HITCHCOCK, ELIZABETH	03/31/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
HITCHCOCK, REX	03/31/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
HOOPER, GENE	06/28/1999	\$1,000	Gordon, Bart
HOOPER, VERA MS	03/31/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
JARED, JERRY	04/19/1999	\$500	Steers, Lee
KUMAR, KRISHNA	06/26/1999	\$250	Gordon, Bart
LEGGE, L W	02/15/1999	\$1,000	Frist, Bill
LOWE, JERE W MRS	07/28/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
LOWE, JERE W MRS	07/30/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
MACKIE, JIMMY	03/12/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
MACKIE, SHIRLEY	03/12/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
MASSA, ERICA J MS	09/30/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
MASSUX, MARY VIRGINIA	03/31/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
MAYBERRY, RALPH	04/30/1999	\$500	Kentucky State Demo Central Exec Cmte McCain, John
MEDLEY, MARTIN L MR JR	08/25/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
MOORE, VIRGINIA M MS	03/31/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
REYNOLDS, BARBARA C	03/31/1999	\$901	Tennessee GOP
SASSER, GARY D	05/19/1999	\$2,000	Steers, Lee
SISSOM, LEIGHTON E	04/09/1999	\$500	Frist, Bill
STITES, JOHN D II	02/01/1999	\$500	Alexander, Lamar
STITES, JOHN D II	03/31/1999	\$500	Alexander, Lamar
STITES, JOHN D II	04/20/1999	\$500	Alexander, Lamar
STITES, JOHN II	02/01/1999	\$500	Frist, Bill
STITES, JOHN II	02/13/1999	\$3,000	Tennessee Republican Party
STITES, ROSEMARY T	04/20/1999	\$500	Alexander, Lamar
STITES, ROSEMARY T	03/31/1999	\$500	Alexander, Lamar
THOMAS, CAROLYN W MRS	07/30/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
TUTTLE, MATTHEW E	02/12/1999	\$300	Nat'l GOP Ctee Kasich, John R
VADEN, JIM	03/23/1999	\$250	Gordon, Bart
VADEN, JIM	06/25/1999	\$250	Duke, David
WALL, JOHN D SR	03/19/1999	\$300	Gore, Al
WOMACK, CHARLES T	03/31/1999	\$1,000	ONKS, ERNEST C MR SR
Zip 38502			
Contributor	Date	Amount	Recipient
MASSA, DONNA SIMPSON	03/31/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
SASSER, GARY D	04/23/1999	\$1,000	Ford, Harold E Jr
SASSER, GARY D	05/07/1999	\$1,000	Alexander, Lamar
WHITEHEAD, GERRY	03/31/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
Zip 39503			
Contributor	Date	Amount	Recipient
EDWARD H. HOOPER	05/28/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
HOOPER, EDWARD H MR	02/27/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
HOOPER, EDWARD H MR	03/31/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
VAUGHN, CHARLES	06/26/1999	\$250	Gordon, Bart
VAUGHN, VICKY	06/26/1999	\$250	Gordon, Bart
VOLPE, JENNette E	03/31/1999	\$500	Gore, Al
Zip 38505			
Contributor	Date	Amount	Recipient
VOLPE, ANGELO A	03/31/1999	\$500	Gore, Al
VOLPE, ANGELO MR	07/27/1999	\$500	Bradley, Bill
VOLPE, JENNette MS	07/27/1999	\$500	Bradley, Bill
Zip 38506			
Contributor	Date	Amount	Recipient
BURNETT, DAVID C	05/04/1999	\$250	National GOP Cong. Ctee
BURNETT, DAVID C ,	07/06/1999	\$250	Bush, George W
CHAPMAN, JUAN	06/29/1999	\$500	Gordon, Bart
DARWIN, DERO A JR	03/12/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
ENGLAND, DOUGLAS	01/25/1999	\$200	Tennessee GOP
ENGLAND, DOUGLAS	05/19/1999	\$3,000	Tennessee GOP
GAMBLE, ROD	06/14/1999	\$500	Rogers Group Inc
HALL, COLEEN MRS	04/06/1999	\$1,000	Bradley, Bill
HALL, JAMES MR	04/06/1999	\$1,000	Bradley, Bill
HUNTER, VALLIE H	03/29/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
LUNDY, TED S MR	08/16/1999	\$500	Gore, Al
MADDUX, LYNNE M MS	04/13/1999	\$1,000	Gore, Al
MCKINNEY, KARLA J	01/29/1999	\$300	Campaign for Working Families
MCKINNEY, KARLA J	03/01/1999	\$250	Bauer, Gary
MORRISON, CAROLYN Y	03/31/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
ONKS, ERNEST C MR SR	04/07/1999	\$250	Gore, Al
THOMPSON, TOMMY	07/28/1999	\$500	National Rifle Assn
Zip 38507			
Contributor	Date	Amount	Recipient
SASSER, GARY D	03/31/99	\$1,000	Gore, Al

Harold finds a friend

By c.d. norman



Visit Sonny Boy's Web site at <http://www.cdnorman.com>

Putnam County used 'questionable method' of funding rural fire protection

Cookeville residents paid for rural Putnam County fire service, audit says

COOKEVILLE, Tenn. -- During the 1997-98 fiscal year, Putnam County expended \$259,089 from the General Fund to pay salaries, purchase equipment, and fund other miscellaneous expenses for fire prevention in rural areas of the county.

But because the county funded rural fire protection through the General Fund, the property taxes of all county citizens, living both inside and outside Cookeville city limits, helped to fund this fire protection. Consequently, citizens living within the City of Cookeville paid for fire protection service already provided by the city.

Tennessee statutes provide that if a city offers fire protection service, the county can offer this service outside the city limits in one of three ways. The county can appropriate funds to volunteer fire departments outside the city limits, or the county can establish fire tax districts and levy an annual fire tax on property owners in each district to fund the total budget for the rural fire departments.

Another way for a county to offer fire protection is to enter into an interlocal agreement with a municipality to provide this service to areas outside the municipality.

Putnam County should provide rural fire protection in a method that complies with state statutes, the audit recommends.

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c.d. 'Sonny Boy' norman.....Graphics, cartoons, columns, nonsense

Altered Indictments at Coomer's Office

Mr. Coomer: Are you taking over for the grand jury now?

Putnam County Clerk of Criminal Court Lewis Coomer is a big shot.

But does his office get to indict people after the grand jury refuses to charge?

Bill Gibson: You are district attorney general. How hard will it be to let your pals go when the evidence is this clear?

Maybe you can bus in a Marine from Arkansas who will swear Looper did it?

In re: case No. 98-0330

COOKEVILLE, Tenn. - *The Putnam Pit* has obtained copies of a Grand Jury indictment allegedly showing a change was made to the official document after it was signed by the judge, grand jury foreman and prosecutor. Christy Roberts, a witness in the case, is an employee in Criminal Court Clerk Lewis Coomer's office, where the documents are kept.

When the indictment was first distributed to lawyers, only one charge -- criminal trespass -- was listed. But by the time it got to court, a vandalism charge was added.

It has been widely reported this year that the FBI has been searching Coomer's records in a ticket-fixing scam involving Police Chief Bob Terry's pal Mike Gaw.

Twice on Tuesday, Aug. 3, Coomer's office called

Putnam County Sheriff's deputies complaining of a disturbance. During the second call, about 3 p.m., Cookeville police officers responded and threw Harris and *Putnam Pit* editor Geoff Davidian out of the public building, claiming there had been a disturbance. But Harris pointed out that the entire exchange had been captured on tape, then produced the recording device, causing the officers to high-tail it back to headquarters to fill out reports.

When Davidian later requested copies of the dispatcher records of the calls, Capt. Nathan Honeycutt waived the usual 25-cents-per-copy charge, stating, "I would do this for anyone in a situation where we could have handled it better."

These documents have been scanned and are available on the Internet at

<http://www.putnampit.com/lowres.html>

Rumor, documents link Mike Gaw, Cookeville Police Chief Bob Terry

COOKEVILLE, Tenn. — Former Police Chief Bill Benson undertook an investigation into a complaint that on March 24, 1998, Police Officer William Drossman, speaking to Tennessee Tech students, slandered businessman Mike Gaw.

Gaw was widely reported to have been partially the target of a federal investigation involving, at least, General Sessions Court Clerk Lewis Coomer's files.

But the official records do not show that Benson took any action whatsoever regarding the officer's concern that there were leaks within the department. In fact, there is no record at all that Police Officer Drossman asked for an investigation in two areas involving Chief Robert Terry.¹

Documents purportedly gathered during an internal investigation were obtained by *The Putnam Pit* following a request under the Tennessee public information act.

The documents, acquired from the Cookeville Police Department, are for the most part unsigned statements allegedly written by city investigators, and correspondence among department employees involved in the investigation.

One report, said by the city to be written by Lt. Mark Webb, states that Gaw made a verbal complaint on March 27, 1998, in which "... [M]r. Gaw stated that he felt some Cookeville Police officers were out to get him.

"He said a family member told him that Officer Drossman said he was a drug dealer, indicated that the Gaw family was involved with drugs., that he should be in prison, and that he misuse his political powers....

"Officer Drossman stated that all he said was that Mr. Gaw was the man to see if you want on Tennessee Highway Patrol."

The documents provided by the city government suggest a troubled state public safety hiring apparatus based on bribes. Law enforcement students are getting a message: money to Gaw can secure a Tennessee Highway Patrol position.

The documents delivered by Cookeville police under the state public records act, if they are correct, suggest:

•**John Agee**, the son of a Tennessee Highway Patrol officer, told an investigator on June 17, 1998, that he was present when Drossman told students at Tennessee Technological University that "Michael Gaw had enough [cocaine] to sprinkle on everyone in Putnam County." In the report, the investigator notes that if Drossman mentioned Gaw's connection to drugs, "I think this was possibly misunderstood by Mr. Agee. I think Officer Drossman was referring to past involvement not now." The investigator allegedly added to his report: "I question why (Agee) has been so vocal in all this. He left me thinking that possibly because his father is a Tennessee Highway Patrol officer, he may have a special interest in this."

•**Steven Brent Anderson**, wrote that John "Agee said he heard some Cook[ville] city officer had to go see one individual. John Agee wouldn't say who it was, Bill said Mike Gaw."

•**Alice K Livingston** told an investigator on June 18, 1998, that Drossman talked about how a Cookeville Police officer "had went to Mr. Gaw for getting a job with THP and how this officer was told if you don't do what I ask I hope you like Memphis," if the city's investigation is to be believed.

•**Vickie S. Morgan**, interviewed June 22, 1998, according to records provided by Cookeville police, said Drossman spoke to students and "named the business man as Michael Gaw and talked of how he required officers to rent apartments from him in order to get a job or stay in this area."

•**Amanda L. Deering** alleges, in what police say is her interview, that Drossman came to talk about a K-9 program but students "kept talking about what they heard." This alleged interview report includes an observation by the interviewer that "Officer Drossman should not have mentioned names in this class, but this discussion about politics and state jobs is common knowledge around Cookeville. His outspoken comments about his own opinion of Mr. Gaw were, in my understanding, a result of actions from another Cookeville Police officer and are out of line and must be stopped."

Drossman denied the allegation that he slandered Gaw. "My personal knowledge about Gaw's drug-related past was minimal and was based solely on information given to me by Sgt. Bob Terry and Police Chief Bill Benson," Drossman wrote in a July 16, 1998, response to the complaint.

He referred to his remarks to the TTU students:

"... [O]ne of the most demeaning aspects of being a police officer, that there is a degree of corruption in police work that affects us all, that it becomes a personal choice for an officer to tolerate corruption on any level or to any degree, and that police officers are often faced with changing their principles when dealing with corruption."

On March 31, 1998, Lt. Webb allegedly drove to Gaw's office, and was discussing with Gaw the need to put a complaint into writing.

"Sgt. Robert Terry with the Cookeville Police Department came in at this time."

Terry, then head of District Attorney General William Gibson's Drug Task Force, is now Cookeville's police chief.

During the investigation Gaw allegedly told an investigator that he was approached by a "uniformed Cookeville Police officer with a CRT patch," who "told him that if anything happens to Bill Drossman over this complaint, some way, some how you will pay," according to the documents obtained from city police.

Terry allegedly had a close personal relationship with Gaw, someone public documents allege at one time had enough cocaine "to sprinkle on everyone in Putnam County."

Terry also may have improperly contacted another officer outside the chain of command to inquire whether Gaw was under a narcotics investigation. Terry allegedly said he was worried it would embarrass Gaw.

Geoff Davidian

¹ See letter at

<http://www.putnampit.com/bensonletterjune17-1999.html>

Everyone was covering for Mike Gaw, ex-Cookeville cop says

Booze for the chief, cash for the governor

It took the FBI to move in on ticket-fixing in Putnam County because Mike Gaw has friends in law enforcement to ensure no local problems, says former Cookeville police officer Bill Drossman. But speeding may not have been the worst violation covered by political influence.

By GEOFF DAVIDIAN
Editor of *The Putnam Pit*

COOKEVILLE, Tenn. – While he headed the Thirteenth Judicial District's Drug Task Force, Cookeville Police Chief Bob Terry chatted with a known cocaine user, helped himself to the crony's booze and called officers to see if friends were under narcotics investigations, an ex-cop says.

During this period, Terry was also charging the city for more overtime pay than any other officer on the force. All this was going on under the nose of District Attorney General Bill Gibson, for whom Terry worked. Ultimately, it was the FBI -- not the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, which Gibson frequently calls off local investigations -- that stepped in.

These close personal ties among drug users, politicians, contributors and police management in the three years since the firing of former Police Chief Richard Holt have raised anticipation of a much wider federal investigation into Mike Gaw's influence than the FBI's original inquiry into Gaw's possible role in fixing State Patrol speeding tickets in Court Clerk Lewis Coomer's office.

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District Attorney General Bill Gibson unsuccessfully prosecuted former City Councilman Don Wagnon three years ago for discussing a city traffic violation with the officer who issued it. But political influence within the Police Department is much more overt today and a Drug Task Force director attempting to give a political

message to a fellow officer out of the chain of command does not seem to bother General Gibson.

Bill Drossman, who quit the Cookeville Police Department after four unhappy years effective June 9, 1999, told *The Putnam Pit* that he reported the Terry-Gaw relationship to former Police Chief Bill Benson and asked for an internal investigation. But he said that to his knowledge Benson did not look into the allegation. In the meantime, Gaw filed a citizen's complaint against Drossman.

In fact, Drossman said, Terry was not alone in his inappropriate contact with Gaw. Drossman said that he met with Cookeville City Manager Jim Shipley for three hours about the Gaw-Terry relationship, and during the conversation Gaw telephoned Shipley's office from City Councilman Steve Copeland's phone, indicating Gaw was also connected to the city's political structure.

Terry has not responded to questions regarding the report and the city has not made available records of any correspondence requested in a public records request.

However, Capt. Nathan Honeycutt said he was unsure where the written request from Drossman to Benson was. He readily offered information about a citizen's complaint against Drossman. The complaint was brought by Mike Gaw. It was dismissed after an investigation.

"I wasn't offered an exit interview," Drossman told *The Pit*. "I was labeled as not a team player." Drossman called the Terry-Gaw relationship "inappropriate," and inconsistent with the oath a law officer takes.

Drossman said in an exclusive interview that on March 24, 1997, he was a guest speaker in former Chief Richard Holt's class at Tennessee Tech. The son of a State Trooper suggested that it was

possible to "buy" a State Patrol job by paying a sum to a person, Drossman said.

"The student didn't mention the name but he said the person was a top contributor to Gov. Sundquist's campaign." Drossman said he offered the name "Mike Gaw" and the student acknowledged it was correct.

Drossman also said that Terry, then a Cookeville police sergeant assigned to direct the Thirteenth Judicial District Drug Task Force, telephoned him at home on May 16, 1997, questioning whether Drossman and another officer were investigating Gaw.

Terry allegedly said he was concerned that a drug investigation case against the friend would be "embarrassing" to Terry, Drossman told *The Putnam Pit*.

Drossman said that "a lot of things are wrong in the police department."

"I was hired under Chief Holt four years ago," he said. "I had just finished my 21st year of law enforcement. We wanted to lay back a little."

"The first sign of trouble was when I saw Major Fred White give a 'Bozo sign' behind Chief Holt's back. I didn't know they were looking for a way to get rid of Chief Holt."

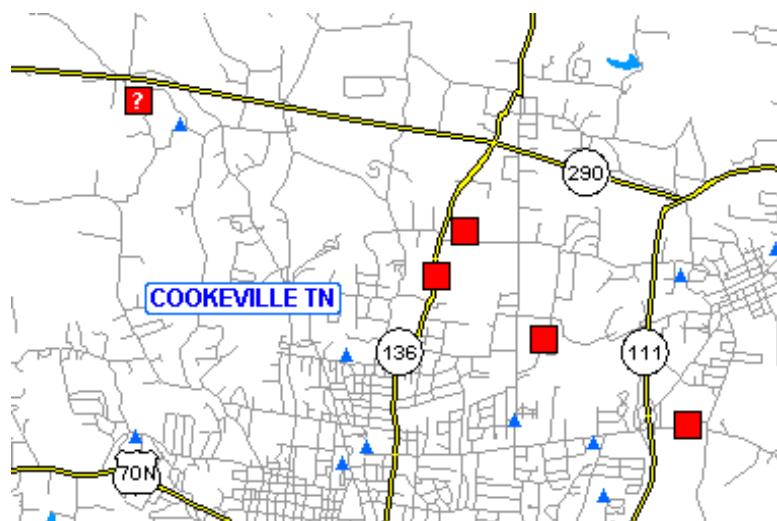
Holt was later fired and filed a federal lawsuit against the city. Former City Councilman Bettye Vaden told *The Pit* in 1997 that Holt was "too progressive" for Cookeville after he turned city records over to the FBI.

"I have never seen such an intimidation factor. It trickles down through City Hall and the department heads," Drossman said. "In my opinion there is a drug-related link to all this."

"What bothers me is that Bob Terry admits he has a close personal relationship with a person like Gaw."

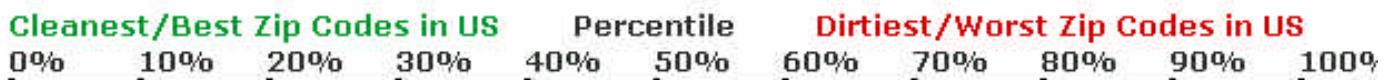
"I took an oath as a police officer and I take it seriously," he said.

Looking for pollution? Putnam County's got plenty

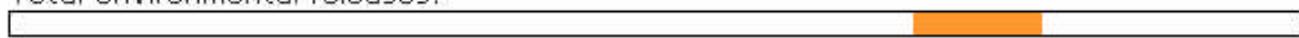


NOTE: Scorecard reports cover only the pollution from manufacturing plants that were required to report for the 1997 TRI, and only 650 listed TRI chemicals. The reports do not cover other key pollution sources, such as cars, small businesses, and electric utilities; or important toxic chemicals, such as dioxin.

1997 Rankings: Major Chemical Releases or Waste Generation in Zip Code 38501*



Total environmental releases:



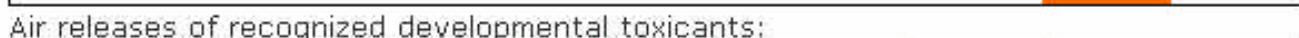
Cancer risk score (air and water releases):



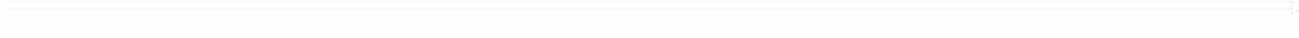
Noncancer risk score (air and water releases):



Air releases of recognized carcinogens:



Air releases of recognized developmental toxicants:



For more information, visit

http://www.scorecard.org/env-releases/zip-code.tcl?zip_code=38501#major_chemical_releases

The message the Cookeville City Council didn't listen to:

Mr. Mayor, Mr. Vice mayor, councilmen.

My name is John Dedmon and for more than a year I worked as an informant for District Attorney General William E. Gibson.

During that time, I was paid to set up innocent people for General Gibson. General Gibson knew they were innocent but he wanted the busts because they made him look good and because his drug task force and economic crime slush funds benefitted when innocent people pleaded guilty to false charges to avoid imprisonment.

I know of TBI agents who skim drugs they confiscate and later use them. People like this should be in Nashville or Memphis or Brushy Mountain doing their drugs. Instead, Cookeville tax payers are footing the bill to bring them here. The task force has, then, in my experience, facilitated the distribution of drugs into the city and brought drug users to Cookeville.

General Gibson's office encourages informants to set up innocent people then rewards them, through payment of public money.

They even ran an ad in the local advertising circular soliciting informants and offering good pay.

Why did Bill Gibson pull TBI agents off the biggest meth bust ever planned?

In one case lazy agents left two pounds of cocaine with an informant who sold half of it and kept the money.

Cookeville taxpayers are in essence financing an ongoing criminal enterprise contributing police officers to William Gibson's politically motivated drug task force. It exists not with the main

objective of reducing the amount of drugs on the streets, but to generate money to Gibson's slush fund.

Then, they have the nerve to ask for overtime. I guarantee you that if you go down to the drug task force at 9 p.m., they'll either be at home in bed or at the office watching TV and eating pizza.

Has the city ever audited the hours Bob Terry and other city officers allegedly spent working overtime to see what cases were worked or arrests made?

The task force is a year behind in reimbursements. Bob Terry was authorizing his own overtime, and his response to the city's attempts to collect the money is to let Terry make the decision to not send bills any more.

Furthermore, the overtime repayments, when made, are paid from the profits from sales of confiscated property in violation of state law.

Gentlemen, there is no accountability.

I today propose to you the following: I will take a polygraph test to show the truthfulness of the

allegations I make tonight.

If I am truthful, I ask you to invite the U.S. Justice Department and its civil rights division to investigate what I am sorry to report is a systemic corruption that is otherwise uncorrectable.

If anyone suggests to you that a federal investigation is unnecessary, ask why they would want to obstruct it unless they are tied in.

This government has the opportunity here and now to eradicate this pestilence.

What will people think if you miss your chance?

All the color brochures in the world will not change the image of Cookeville if these conditions are not addressed.

Finally, I am giving copies of my remarks to The Putnam Pit to post on the Internet so that this message can be available to all those who were not able to see it on cable tonight.

Thank you.

John Dedmon