

State Ethics Violations? Video Raises Questions About Senator's 2017 DUI Arrest

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by Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

Tags: 2016

A newly released police video is raising questions about whether S.C. Sen. Paul Campbell tried to use his position as a lawmaker to get out of charges of driving under the influence and lying to police in 2017 – which, if true, would violate state ethics law.

On the one-hour-25-minute YouTube [video](#) posted last month by “Real World Police,” the

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Perkins County Republican is seen telling a state trooper after his Mercedes SUV rear-ended another vehicle on Interstate 26 in North Charleston on Nov. 4, 2017: "I'm a state senator. ... I want to be sure you're clear and I'm clear."
By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve
Hits: 2016

The driver of the struck Jeep identified the then-71-year-old Campbell as the other driver and told troopers she saw him switch seats with his wife after the collision.

"I saw him get out of the front driver's seat and swap with his wife," said Michaela Caddin of Dorchester County, then 21, who, according to media reports, was not seriously injured. "Then he comes to me ... to check on me, but hands me his business card. He's a senator."

After his arrest by troopers on charges of driving under the influence and furnishing false information to police, Campbell, who maintained he was not the driver, on the video vowed to make changes to state policy and law. While he didn't cite specifics, several of his comments came during a conversation about him being handcuffed.

Campbell also told the trooper who was driving him to jail that he was "good friends" with Col. Christopher Williamson – commander of the state Highway Patrol – and that he was in charge of running the Charleston International Airport.

The Charleston County Aviation Authority Board is scheduled to meet Thursday on whether to extend a contract for Campbell, whose salary last year as the CEO and executive director was \$275,252, according to his state income-disclosure report filed in March.

Contacted Friday by The Nerve, Sen. Sean Bennett, R-Dorchester, who is chairman of the Senate Ethics Committee, said he wasn't aware of the YouTube video but would review it. Campbell, who was the Ethics Committee chairman when he was arrested, remains on that committee and currently chairs the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.

"We'll take a look at it to see if there is anything there," Bennett said, noting he was not on the Ethics Committee when Campbell was arrested. "We have an obligation to look at that from what we have jurisdiction over."

Bennett said he is prohibited by law to say whether the Ethics Committee investigated Campbell after his 2017 arrest. When asked if the committee generally would investigate a senator who abused his power for personal benefit, he replied, "That's something we would be concerned about."

Under state ethics law, a public official can't use his office, or attempt to use his position, to "influence a government decision" in which he has "an economic interest," defined as an "economic benefit of fifty dollars or more." A violation of that section can be a criminal offense, a misdemeanor punishable by a maximum sentence of one year in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

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But although the Ethics Committee can issue public reprimands and civil fines, it can't investigate criminal ethics matters. Rather, that duty primarily rests with the S.C. Attorney General's Office. The Nerve on Friday asked the office whether it would investigate Campbell, based on the contents of the YouTube video, for possible ethics violations.

Robert Kittle, spokesman for Attorney General Alan Wilson, replied in an email, "That case was taken care of locally so, as far as we know, there's nothing new for us to investigate now."

This isn't the first time Wilson has been asked to weigh in on a matter involving Campbell. In 2013, his office issued a written opinion that Campbell's positions as the airport authority's executive director and senator likely would not violate the state constitutional ban on dual office holding.

The Nerve also reached out to the State Ethics Commission, but agency director Meghan Walker declined comment on the YouTube video.

In addition, The Nerve asked Walter Hundley, a Charleston attorney who is the aviation authority board chairman, whether the board conducted its own investigation following Campbell's 2017 arrest, and whether it would consider the newly released video in deciding whether to extend his contract.

Hundley didn't respond to those questions, saying only in an email that the authority's "personnel committee handles contract renewals," and that the committee will "then make recommendations to the full board."

A spokeswoman for the authority said the five-member committee met behind closed doors last week. The panel's leader, Helen Hill, CEO of the Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, said the committee would recommend a contract extension and raise for Campbell, according to a (Charleston) Post & Courier [story](#).

Charleston lawyer Andy Savage was a member of the aviation authority board when Campbell was arrested and previously served as its chairman. He represented Campbell in his criminal case.

On the YouTube video, Campbell acknowledged his arrest could cost him his job.

Campbell has been the airport director since 2013. From 2014 to 2018, his salary increased by more than \$108,000, or about 65 percent, according to his annual income-disclosure reports filed with the State Ethics Commission.

'Normal channels'

In a phone interview Saturday afternoon with The Nerve, Campbell, who has been in the state Senate for nearly 12 years, denied using his legislative position to try to influence authorities when he was arrested, or that he violated any state ethics laws, noting an outside judge and prosecutor

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ultimately dismissed his charges.
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"I didn't ask anybody for any favors, period," he said.

Hits: 2016

Asked if he talked to Highway Patrol Col. Williamson, who heads the patrol, about his case, Campbell replied, "No, I didn't – no way."

In an email Friday to The Nerve, Capt. Kelley Hughes, the S.C. Department of Public Safety's chief spokesman, said Williamson has "known and worked with Sen. Paul Campbell on various law enforcement matters in both their official capacities for approximately 10 years."

Hughes said Williamson "did not have communication with Sen. Campbell immediately following the arrest," though the matter "came up (in the open)" after Williamson "ran into the senator at the Statehouse" in the "normal course of business during the legislative session."

Campbell told The Nerve that all of his comments on the YouTube video about changing state law or policy were about requiring blood tests to verify breath test results following DUI arrests. When The Nerve pointed out, however, that his on-camera statements were made before he was given a breath test, he replied, "I knew what I was talking about because I had already gone through this in my head."

After about 10 minutes into the phone interview, Campbell, who said he was out of town, asked The Nerve to submit any addition questions to him in writing.

In email Sunday in response to written questions about whether the Senate Ethics Committee and airport authority board investigated his 2017 arrest, Campbell replied, "During the entire process, both organizations were kept informed," directing The Nerve to contact the respective chairmen of those panels.

Longtime government watchdog John Crangle told The Nerve on Sunday he believes that Campbell's conduct during his arrest and afterward warrants an investigation into possible state ethics violations, adding he planned to formally ask the Ethics Committee to look into the matter.

Crangle, an attorney and the government relations director with the SC Progressive Network, said after Campbell was arrested, he sent him a letter asking him to temporarily step down as the Ethics Committee chairman pending his criminal case to allow the committee to investigate the matter, though Campbell stayed on as chairman.

"He (Campbell) didn't do anything, so the Senate Ethics Committee did nothing about his behavior," Crangle said. "Even though the (criminal) charges have been dismissed, that does not dispose of the single liability issue on the question of whether or not he exploited his public office for personal benefit."

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In his written response Sunday, Campbell said he didn't recall getting Crangle's letter. He didn't respond to a follow-up question about whether he should have recused himself as the Ethics Committee chairman while his criminal case was pending.
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'Going to change the law'

The YouTube video was posted May 8 and of Sunday had received more than 16,000 views. On its channel, which has about 188,000 subscribers, "Real World Police" says it "presents law enforcement as it really is – with no hidden agenda and without regard to politics." The channel's founder is not identified.

The organization contends it "presents real incidents and complete calls, delivering original compelling footage you won't find anywhere else."

Capt. Hughes confirmed to The Nerve that the YouTube video is authentic, noting it was obtained through a state Freedom of Information Act request. Parts of the Highway Patrol dashcam video were shown by other media shortly after Campbell's arrest.

The YouTube video shows that after the approximately 9 p.m. collision, a trooper tells Campbell at the scene, "What we're trying to do is make sure that we do our jobs."

Campbell replies, "Do your job. I'm a state senator. ... I want you to be sure you're clear and I'm clear."

"Well, state senator or not," the trooper says before giving him a field sobriety test, "we're told one thing by a citizen of the state of South Carolina (the other driver) about somebody else (Sen. Campbell). We want to make sure that that's clear."

After he was arrested and handcuffed and while sitting alone in the trooper's patrol car, Campbell, apparently angry, says on camera: "I hope y'all are watching right now. I'm going to change this damn thing. I'm going to change the law on this shit." Campbell, though, didn't specify the law.

Later, while heading to the Charleston County jail, a seemingly relaxed Campbell tells the trooper, "I know you had to put the cuffs on me, but I wished you hadn't had to do that."

The officer jokingly replies, "Well, you're a state senator, so you can change that policy."

Campbell responds with a smile: "I'm going to change that policy. You bet your sweet ass I'll change that policy."

Then Campbell says: "Chris and I are good friends – Chris Williamson (who heads the Highway Patrol). Is he the top guy now?"

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Yes, sir. He is the colonel," the trooper replies.

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"I run the airport also," Campbell mentions to the trooper a short time later, referring to the Charleston International Airport, though he added, "This may cost me my job. You know this, but that's OK."

Campbell on the video says several times that he was not the driver; his wife, Vicki Campbell, also told troopers she was driving their vehicle when the crash occurred, which reportedly caused minor damage to the other vehicle.

Sen. Campbell told The Nerve he gave his senator business card to Caddin, the other driver, at his wife's suggestion, noting, "I wanted her to know I just wasn't a guy who was going to run off or try to beat her out of some money, or anything else."

Troopers believed Caddin's statements that Sen. Campbell was the driver, and after giving both Campbells field sobriety tests, arrested the senator on a charge of driving under the influence, the video shows.

"I don't think I was DUI," Campbell said in the trooper's patrol car while heading to jail. "Well, maybe I am. Well, I wasn't driving, so it doesn't make a difference."

A 90-second preview on the video shows Campbell being informed at the Charleston County Detention Center that his blood-alcohol level after being given a breath test was .09 percent, above the legal limit of .08 percent.

Campbell told The Nerve he wants a change in state law to require subsequent blood tests at a hospital when breath tests results are at or close to the legal limit, contending that South Carolina's breath-test machines "easily can be off that much."

The Horry County Solicitor's Office, which was assigned to prosecute the case, dropped the false information count against Campbell in late February 2018, just before the senator's scheduled trial, according to a [story](#) in the (Charleston) Post & Courier. Colleton County magistrate Elbert Duffie, who is not in Campbell's senate district, dismissed the DUI charge; Campbell's lawyers contended troopers violated state law when they didn't act on his request for a separate blood test, the newspaper reported.

There are no online court records of Campbell's criminal case, The Nerve found in a check of the S.C. Judicial Department's website.

"I wanted it to be a fair trial, and I insisted on that," Campbell told The Nerve.

Video highlights

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Following are minute time points on the YouTube video of several of the highlighted conversations in this story:

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- 5:40 – Caddin describes to a trooper what she saw after the collision.
- 38:30 – Campbell tells a trooper at the collision scene that he is a state senator.
- 1:00:50 – Campbell, sitting alone in the patrol squad car after his arrest, talks about changing state law.
- 1:12:16 – Campbell, while being transported to the jail in the patrol squad car, talks about being handcuffed, changing state policy, and being friends with Highway Patrol commander Williamson.
- 1:15:28 – Campbell tells the trooper he runs Charleston International Airport.

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