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DAVID WATKINS RESPONDS TO SECRETARY OF STATE ORDER ON METROCENTER PROJECT

David Watkins, the President of Watkins Development, is responding to the finding of the Secretary of State hearing officer, attorney Robert Bailess of Vicksburg, and the affirmation of that finding by Secretary of State, Delbert Hosemann. Watkins is the developer who successfully completed the King Edward Hotel and Standard Life Building renovation, as well as the Meridian Law Enforcement building, one of the finest such facilities in the southeast.

Speaking through his spokesperson, lawyer Lance Stevens, the Watkins defense team states:

“The finding of the hearing officer is a joke. He specifically writes, on page 17 of his report, that ‘there exists no applicable statutory requirement that fraud be proven at all...’ Indeed, there was no evidence of fraud whatsoever.” Stevens says.

“Hosemann agrees with the hearing officer’s conclusion, on page 18 of the report, that ‘whether or not the money was owed (to Watkins) is irrelevant.’ Watkins is apparently now fined for withdrawing his own money. That is absurd.” Watkins alleged at the hearing, without any contradiction, that the Retro Metro business owed him well over the amount he withdrew for expenses like the purchase of the MetroCenter property and his costs for development of the property.

“This was a private loan, not public money,” Stevens states. The loan was for \$2 million more than the hard construction costs estimated to complete the project, so, according to Watkins, the lenders clearly knew that development and procurement costs would have to be included. “The lenders did not expect Watkins Development to work for free or buy the property for nothing.”

Watkins, a lifelong Democrat, also notes that the decision is so contrary to the law and facts that it smacks of political abuse by his Republican accuser, Hosemann. Bailess, the judge or hearing officer in the two day trial, is a Vicksburg lawyer and Hosemann contributor (according to Secretary of State records). He is also the lawyer for one of Hosemann’s business interests, 100 Colony Cross Blvd. LLC (according to Secretary of State records).

“If I tried all my cases in front of my best buddy and personal lawyer, from my hometown, I bet I’d win them all, too,” Stevens said.

Watkins will appeal the adverse ruling of the Secretary of State.

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