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Pottawattamie County Taxpayers Hire Legal Spokesman

Call for Wilber, Hanusa, Voss and Moats to Recuse Themselves over Actual and Suspected Conflicts

COUNCIL BLUFFS, Iowa – Pottawattamie Alliance for Voter Education (“PAVE”), a grassroots coalition of Pottawattamie County voters, today announced its support for Supervisor **Scott Belt**, rejecting allegations in a recent removal petition and condemning what they describe as a political attempt to overturn the will of 16,000 voters who placed Scott Belt in office.

Under Iowa Code chapter 66, a county supervisor may be removed from office by the district court, but the process is a **“drastic and extraordinary”** measure, and the State must prove the grounds for removal only by **clear, satisfactory, and convincing evidence – a heightened evidentiary standard.**

County Attorney Matt Wilber filed a Chapter 66 petition seeking Belt’s removal based on an allegation of erratic behavior at a town hall meeting. The petition has resulted in a temporary suspension order for Belt while the case proceeds in court, but it is a civil proceeding filed on Wilber’s direction and not the result of any criminal charge or conviction. Supervisor Belt has already denied wrongdoing and is actively defending the allegation.

“Scott Belt is a hardworking public servant, who appears to have had a brief health episode. PAVE’s concern is Belt’s now being targeted for doing his job,” said **spokesman Perry A. Pirsch**, speaking for the group. “Over 16,000 Pottawattamie County voters chose Belt just three years ago. One county attorney should not be allowed to substitute his judgment for the will of the voters on the basis of an unsubstantiated allegations and, in fact, an unprovable speculation.”

Eyewitness and community support

In a Letter to the Editor posted to the Daily Nonpareil yesterday, current Pottawattamie County Supervisor and former Pottawattamie County Republican Central Committee chair **Jeff Jorgensen**, who has known Belt since he first took office as a county supervisor, attended the November 5 townhall. Jorgensen reported he saw nothing before the meeting that caused him concern and believes Belt experienced a brief health episode that evening, not intoxication. Jorgensen noted that many conditions – including dehydration or an adverse reaction to medication – mimic the symptoms viewers saw in a widely shared video.

Jorgensen further observed, as he has traveled the county in recent days, “nobody has attacked Belt or expressed support for his removal from office,” but many voters are worried about being

disenfranchised by a judicial process that has already sidelined an elected official who is up for reelection in 2026.

A long record of service

Supervisor Belt is in the **third year of a third term** on the **Pottawattamie County Board of Supervisors**, after previously serving on the **Council Bluffs City Council**. He has been in elected office for more than two decades and holds a professional license as a real-estate agent.

Not only was Belt's public record previously free of any allegations of publicly disclosed offenses, supporters note Belt has consistently stood up for taxpayers, pushed back on wasteful spending, and asked hard questions about controversial county projects – including county contracts, the management of county owned assets, and standing up for voters opposed to a proposed wind-farm development.

Concerns about timing and motivation, Wilber conflict of interest

In fact, Supervisor Belt's more recent pointed questions about county legal management had put him at odds with Wilber. Wilber, himself, has drawn public criticism in recent months over his mishandling of multiple county matters, including concerns raised publicly by State Auditor **Rob Sand**, as reported in local media – criticism directed at the county attorney, not at Supervisor Belt.

"Scott Belt has asked uncomfortable questions and attempting to engage in budgetary and other oversight, some of which directly affects the Pottawattamie County Attorney's Office, which is inside the proper role of the Supervisors," said **Perry A. Pirsch**. "It appears the county attorney has been spending county resources combing through Scott Belt's social life to try to justify removal from office based on ambiguous symptoms at a townhall, or social gathering, and not a meeting of the Board of Supervisors. To the Pottawattamie County voters who formed PAVE, this raises the concern of retaliation, or a cover-up, and not the pursuit of justice."

PAVE understands Wilber's investigation in support of Belt's removal is at a time when jail employees cannot be afforded all the holidays off that other county employees receive due to budget shortfalls. The county has also told the Sheriff's department to make do with current employee numbers due to lack of resources.

Said Pirsch, "In a county where budgetary constraints are currently impacting public safety, PAVE members believe any deployment of resources in an attempt to oust a popular elected official for slurred speech at a social event takes on an even more odious appearance to the taxpayer and deserves further scrutiny."

Like Belt, Wilber had also faced recent scrutiny in office. Unlike Belt, Wilber acknowledged he had made mistakes. For example, poor legal drafting of county executive contracts. Better legal documents might have shielded the taxpayers from liability. Further, in the instance of a \$112,000.00 payout to the former Pottawattamie County HR Director, Wilbur shared county documents with selected news media, but then withheld the information from the taxpayers and voters as ostensibly "too confidential."

PAVE also notes, while the venue for the removal hearings has been removed to the 3rd Judicial District in an attempt to avoid potential conflicts of interest between the elected judge overseeing the case and the

voting area where Belt was elected, PAVE members believe Wilber also is not a disinterested, conflict-free party in the decision to raise allegations against Belt, who has been a vocal critic, and Wilber should recuse himself to avoid, at the least, the appearance of impropriety.

Additional Possible Conflicts of Interest for Hanusa, Voss, and Moats

At least one such document Wilber shared with select media, but not the taxpayers, is a letter that was signed by several county department heads. PAVE questions whether this letter formed the basis of allegations of harassment, or threat of a lawsuit, against the county that resulted in the subsequently over six-figure settlement payment to the former HR Director. Because this matter is ongoing and the HR Director's fulfillment of the terms of the agreement extend for a period of months into 2026, should there be continued litigation, the county department heads who signed this letter are witnesses and may be called upon to testify or be deposed about their participation in the formulation and circulation of this document. The County Board of Supervisors will then need to decide whether to allow a new settlement to be struck or for a suit to move forward, which could result in the embarrassment of the officials involved.

Iowa code **prohibits officials with conflicts of interest from serving on the committee** to fill a vacancy in the Board of Supervisors. PAVE requests transparency from county officials Mary Ann Hanusa, Lea Voss, and Andrew Moats, who would be on the Committee to appoint a temporary or permanent replacement for Belt, to disclose any potential conflicts of interest and also abstain if such a conflict exists. PAVE requests Hanusa, Voss, and Moats to assure the taxpayers they did not sign a letter in the HR Director's allegations against the county that resulted in the subsequent taxpayer funded settlement payment. If they cannot attest that they aren't involved, they should immediately recuse themselves and be replaced with committee members who do not have such glaring conflicts. Of course, any conflicts would not be the fault of Hanusa, Voss, or Moats; conflicts occasionally arise. But should any exist, they should be disclosed and the would-be participants should recuse themselves.

Conclusion: call for due process and respect for will of voters

The group's statement concludes, "In summation, Supervisor Scott Belt deserves the presumption of innocence and the continued support of the community he has served for over twenty years. Under the Iowa Code, for a Chapter 66 removal -- a **"drastic and extraordinary"** measure -- the State must prove the grounds for removal with **clear, satisfactory, and convincing evidence**, a heightened evidentiary standard. This is likely impossible in light of Belt's proclamation of factual innocence.. Given the existence of, at best, only speculative evidence and in light of the timing of the allegations by Wilber, PAVE is demanding Belt get a fair hearing and any officials leading an effort to remove an elected official and pick his replacement be free of conflicts of interest. The case against Belt must be made with real evidence; not leaks, speculation, or political grudges. Anything less is voter disenfranchisement."

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About Perry Pirsch: Pirsch is a Nebraska employment, business, and government affairs attorney who has worked with multiple nonprofits on issues of public concern. For over two decades, Pirsch, who has a Masters in Journalism and Public Administration in addition to his Juris Doctorate, has championed the rights of the voters, employees, employers, public officials, and the wrongly accused in courts and in the court of public opinion.

About PAVE: PAVE is an informal association founded by Pottawattamie County taxpayers and voters to encourage sound fiscal and ethical county practices and policies, and to foster a transparent and accountable county government.