



The Las Animas County Republican Central Committee

10702 Bishop Ridge Road

Trinidad, CO 81082

EMAIL: chairperson@lacgop.org

PHONE: (719) 680-3470

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SENT ELECTRONIC MAIL / RETURN RECEIPT

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

March 25, 2024

The Board of County Commissioners

Las Animas County, Colorado

Trinidad, CO81082

Dear Honorable Commission:

The loss of a loved one is a very traumatic event in a person's life. It comes with extraordinary complications when that deceased person passes through the world of homelessness, for whatever cause has been the basis of that homelessness. It is still a very tragic event.

It is a growing concern across this nation, with hundreds of thousands of homeless now affecting every sort of community across our great country.

When those unfortunate circumstances strike here at home, remote, poorly funded counties are being impacted by having to account for these unexpected burials of the unclaimed deceased. Debate arises, and it is easy for some citizens to sit back and comment on the next steps to take in handling those cases.

However, what is the correct answer to such a tragic event?

Should the County build massive frozen storage facilities to store those unidentified bodies indefinitely?

Does the County conduct individual private burials or cremations?

Solutions sound relatively easy until one must account for families' potential wishes, if they are located, and balanced with the need for someone to pay for said services.

Historically, taxpayer's attitudes have changed very rapidly in those cases.

Case in point: the matter here in Las Animas County, Colorado. A County Coroner faced with disposing of several homeless corpses needed to make a cost-effective decision on behalf of the citizens in Las Animas County.

Multiple bodies were placed in temporary graves, right, wrong, or indifferent to the opinions of civilian observers. Identification in the form of descriptions and DNA samples was properly procured. The corpses, individually encased, were tagged adequately for identification in the event of exhuming. Permitting the burials, a Coroner's responsibility was purportedly produced.

Now comes a family, based on the proper identification work determined by the diligence of the County Coroner – nearly a year after the temporary burial - to claim the remains of their family member. I can only imagine it as an unbearable process for the family.

This delicate matter is further complicated by needless rumors, false accusations, and personal innuendos of a political nature, which are merely used to attack the County Coroner.

False accusations were levied against the County Coroner to such a magnitude that the media, far and wide, permitted the public broadcast of our County Coroner as having mysteriously killed and buried the missing person, David Shier. All the press pranced Mr. Shier's grief-stricken daughter around in print and on television, making outlandish, unsubstantiated, and defamatory claims.

This prompted a criminal investigation through the Las Animas County Sheriff's Department with the cooperation of the Colorado Bureau of Investigation. This formal investigation is nearing completion, and it appears the initial findings reflect the county coroner's acquittal of any criminal wrongdoing. All the matters of concern were handled in accordance with the laws of Colorado.

As is the case with most outlandish claims in Las Animas County, Monday morning quarterbacking is always the onslaught of discussion of what someone should or should not have done items differently.

However, Monday Morning Quarterbacking is a far cry from the hateful, hurtful and outlandish accusations levied against the County Corner; along with the abuse that he and his family have endured from this outrageous experience.

The matter does bring up several issues for the County Commission:

1. What is the emergency action plan for Las Animas County to address the growing number of unidentifiable homeless persons when they become deceased in Las Animas County? What is the process for the coroner to follow should similar conditions occur?
2. How does the County of Las Animas protect the rights of human dignity in these matters while balancing the county's fiscal responsibilities?
3. What is on this RECALL EFFORT now that the charge is illegitimate, and the coroner has been exonerated?
4. What will be the action of this Commission and the County Attorney now that the CBI has cured this action? Will they address the outrageous conduct of the media and prominent

individuals in the community in their libelous claims and accusations against the County Coroner?

Whatever the decision, I pray it will be swift, deliberate, and exacting in its justice to restore the faith and trust in the County Coroner's office.

As the Chair of the Las Animas County Republican Party, I wish to stress that it's firmly established within our Christian belief that everyone deserves a decent burial, regardless of their stature.

Once discovered, the family's wishes should be addressed with proper restitution to the county for services rendered. This work is accomplished only through the funeral services selected to transition or transfer ownership of the remains and existing gravesite through the county coroner's office.

Never again should any public office endure a matter like this in Las Animas County.

I pray for a respectful and meaningful resolution to this matter.

It's time our community put petty politics and jealousy aside and continue working for the common good of all Las Animas County citizens.

Respectfully

D. Lee Phelan SR.

Chair

Las Animas County Republican Central Committee.