

April 14th, 2010
For Immediate Release:
Contact Erwin Jackson (850) 566-0036

City Commission Candidate Erwin Jackson to Call for Audit of Questionable City Credit Card Purchases

City Commission Candidate Dr. Erwin Jackson will call this afternoon for an audit of credit card receipts for purchases made by City Commissioners and city staff.

“During the past several months I have asked our City Commissioners to just do what’s best for the citizens of Tallahassee. Unfortunately, our elected and appointed city leaders have continued to do what’s best financially for themselves, at the expense of the public. Increasing Commissioners’ personal compensation by \$22,000 without public approval, inflating their retirement income, approving lucrative city contracts to their campaign managers, and most egregious, a Commissioner who accepted money from a city vendor. I think we can do better. This “self entitlement” mentality is further displayed by the way City Commissioners and staff use City credit cards and this practice must stop! I have recently learned of highly questionable credit card purchasing practices involving City Commissioners and staff. Credit card use seems to indicate that when it comes to looking out for the citizens, our Commissioners are out to lunch.”

As of March 16, 2010 the city had issued 1198 cards. Purchases totaled \$1,173,596.98 during the month of February alone.

At Wednesday's City Commission meeting, Jackson will provide documentation for any interested parties that show, among other things:

- 1) **Credit cards are being used by city commissioners to purchase their own lunch and that of friends/citizens.**

On November 23, 2009 Appointed Commissioner Gil Ziffer enjoyed lunch at the Kool Beanz Café, charging his meal, the meal of his guest, a nice tip, and sent the bill to the citizens of Tallahassee to pay. It is not the responsibility of Tallahassee citizens to pay for the entertaining expenses of city officials.

- 2) **City executive staff charges their “working lunch” to a City credit card.**

The city manager and her staff have enjoyed three “working lunches” during a 10 day period. They enjoyed lunch at Andrew’s and Harry’s Bar and Grill and sent the bill to the tax payer. City Attorney Jim English prefers taking his guests to One O One, but they all agree it’s always best to send the bill to the tax payer.

- 3) **Executive staff expenses are paid by the city even if they cannot locate required receipts. The City requirement that all charges have two signatures is being ignored.**

City Attorney Jim English lost the receipt from a “working lunch” (\$67.90) and a gas receipt

(\$49.46), yet the city paid for both expenses. The City Attorney also ignored city policy by failing to secure a second signature on some of his purchases.

4) Memberships to private clubs and organizations are charged to credit cards.

The Mayor's Governor's Club membership and Commissioner Gillum's Leadership Tallahassee dues were both charged to the tax payers. Tax payers were even required to pay the Mayor's Christmas gift to Governor Club servers (\$26).

5) Room service and health spa expenses were charged to credit cards.

On a recent trip to Washington the Mayor enjoyed room service during three of the four night stay (\$30.53 - \$46.97 nightly). He also charged \$25 to use the "health spa" before retiring to his room for supper. Using City credit cards at health spas, massage parlors and escort services are three merchant categories prohibited by the City's Administrative Procedures Manual.

6) Trips to Israel and Russia have been charged to Commissioner credit cards.

These trips cost the tax payer approximately \$2,361 per commissioner per trip. The sister city program is fun however; elected officials should not burden the tax payer with their international travel plans.

7) Governor's Club valet parking was charged on the Mayor's credit card.

Despite City Hall's relative proximity to the Governor's Club, Tallahassee tax payers were charged for the use of valet service, courtesy of the Mayor's credit card. Even more remarkable, staff reported the Mayor was out of town on the night of the charge!

Based on these findings, Jackson recommends:

- o City Auditor Sam McCall should audit credit card spending by the City Commission and executive staff. All food purchases, including food for friends and guests that occurred while in Leon County should be immediately reimbursed by the card holder to the public.
- o City Commissioners and the City Manager Thompson should establish policies preventing the purchase of meals within Leon County except for authorized gatherings open to the public.
- o Commissioners should direct that Sister city program travel not be paid by the tax payer. The financial burden should rest with those individuals who choose to participate, not the public.
- o Maximum daily per diem charges should be utilized. Reimbursement for actual expenses should be eliminated. Thus room service, health spa, and expensive meals will be the responsibility of the traveler.