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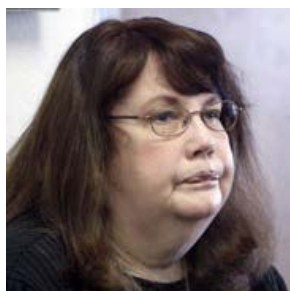
Former Walker aide pleads guilty, will cooperate with DA

Darlene Wink awaits sentencing, 3 others to be tried in John Doe probe

By *Steve Schultze of the Journal Sentinel*

Feb. 7, 2012

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Darlene Wink

Darlene Wink pleaded guilty Tuesday to two misdemeanor charges of fundraising in the courthouse for then-Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker's campaign for governor.

Her convictions were the first stemming from a secret John Doe investigation into a variety of issues from Walker's tenure as county executive. Three other former Walker courthouse aides and appointees also have been charged through the Doe probe.

Wink, 61, worked as Walker's constituent services coordinator in the county executive's office at the time, a job that paid about \$41,000 a year. She was charged with working on [fundraising events](#) for Walker's gubernatorial campaign in 2009 and 2010 while in her taxpayer-funded county job.

"What I was doing was putting together fliers that were for a fundraiser," Wink told Circuit Court Judge Daniel Konkol.

As part of a plea deal, Wink agreed to provide information to prosecutors in the ongoing Doe probe, now in its 20th month. The deal calls for Wink to serve no jail time, though the judge isn't bound by that recommendation.

Her sentencing is set for May 15. Prosecutors wanted three months to question Wink, who would have preferred a swifter sentencing, said her lawyer, Peter Wolff.

She faces a maximum of six months in jail and \$1,000 fine on each of the two counts.

Tedious history

Wolff said Wink was eager to fully cooperate with prosecutors, particularly in connection with embezzlement charges. Wink played a role in Operation Freedom, an annual picnic for veterans and their families at the zoo that Walker hosted. Timothy Russell, another former Walker courthouse aide, and Kevin Kavanaugh, have been charged with

embezzling money intended for the veterans event. At the time, Kavanaugh served on the Veterans Service Commission under appointment from Walker.

Wink, using several email accounts while at work in the courthouse, worked for several months on a birthday fundraiser for Walker in late '09 that was canceled and replaced with "a holiday gala" fundraiser for Walker, a complaint says. She also worked on Walker fundraising in 2010, the complaint says.

Wolff said Wink was able to complete all her legitimate county assignments in her courthouse job, as well as the campaign work done at the request of someone else. Wolff declined to identify that person. Wink was not pressured to do the campaign work, Wolff said.

The criminal complaint against Wink says she exchanged messages with Walker campaign staffers and Republican Party campaign officials about Walker fundraisers while she was at work.

In one email exchange in 2009, Wink asked friend and fellow Walker aide Russell how she could erase a document from an online chat session. Russell told her it would disappear from her computer when she logged out, though investigators were able to ferret it out.

"I just am afraid of going to jail - ha! ha!" Wink wrote.

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Wink worked in Walker's county office during his nearly entire eight years as county executive. She quit her county job in May 2010 after admitting to the Journal Sentinel that she had spent work time posting online comments in support of Walker or critical of his 2010 opponent in the governor's race, Tom Barrett.

Wink was also vice chairwoman of the Milwaukee County Republican Party.

Promised cooperation

Kelly Rindfleisch, a former deputy chief of staff to Walker at the county, has been charged with four felony misconduct in office charges for doing campaign fundraising on county time.

Walker has said he had no knowledge of any improper campaign activity at the courthouse and that he had a clear policy forbidding it. The Republican governor has said he has agreed to meet with prosecutors seeking to interview him in connection with the John Doe investigation.

Graeme Zielinski, a spokesman for the state Democratic Party, said the Wink case illustrated a "criminal culture" at the courthouse aimed at benefiting Walker politically.

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