

# Thompson: Nearly \$20,000 claimed in expenses

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since July 1. The five commissioners combined are allocated \$17,500 total for the year.

"No other commissioner has ever come near to spending their full allotment," Lee said.

Lee wrote a letter to Thompson in March asking her to watch her spending. She had claimed \$7,328 in expenses during the first nine months of the fiscal year.

Thompson pushed back at a meeting in April, pointing to what she viewed as a lack of a concrete vision or goals from other commissioners.

During the last fiscal year, commissioners were granted only \$13,500 for expenses. At the April meeting, the board voted to direct an additional \$2,000 to cover expenses, and the allocation was raised by \$4,000 this year when the county budget was adopted.

Thompson has claimed nearly \$20,000 in her two years and nine months since being elected as a commissioner. Lee said the money should be spent on liaison and committee assignments, rather than the trainings and conferences that Thompson has often attended. He referred to the conferences and trainings as "mutual admiration societies" that are not relevant to county business.

Lee directed staff Wednesday to schedule an agenda item at the board's Nov. 8 meeting regarding the expenses. As



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian  
Clatsop County Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan, left, and Commissioner Lianne Thompson, right, listen to a presentation at a board of commissioners meeting held in May.

chairman, he has the power to approve or not approve commissioner expense claims. Commissioners will hold a discussion at that meeting before Lee approves Thompson's expenses. They also may set more specific policies.

"It's something that I feel rises to the level where the board needs to have a discussion," Lee said.

### 'Unacceptable'

Commissioners also commented on an incident in June in which Thompson allegedly placed her hands on a county employee and spoke in a loud and frustrated tone about

Moore after a Red Cross meeting at Fort Clatsop.

At the meeting, Thompson allegedly placed her hands on either the hands or, according to a witness, upper arms near the shoulders of a county employee, who has not been named.

Prior to the contact, she said she "was the only commissioner on the board who worked." During the contact, she allegedly asked in a vociferous tone, "Do you know what he did?" in reference to Moore. She then claimed the county manager had intentionally scheduled a meeting in May so she would not

be able to attend.

The investigation concluded that she was acting in her role as commissioner at the time and that the incident violated board behavior policy.

"Putting her hands on staff and insisting that they do what she wants them to do, putting them in those difficult positions is unacceptable to me," Commissioner Sarah Nebeker said Wednesday. "It is a distraction for staff when they are striving to get their work accomplished in a timely manner. I do not support this behavior that continues to be extremely difficult. It wastes their time, our time and, therefore, county tax

dollars."

In lieu of discipline, Portland-based labor attorney Heather Martin sent a letter to Thompson through her attorney earlier this month in what Lee said would be the final correspondence about the matter. In the letter, Martin explains that Thompson may "be held personally liable" for similar behavior in the future if it leads to a lawsuit against the county.

"Even if there were no applicable board policies, which there are, your actions directed toward the employee in question fell below the level of decorum expected by a county leader toward an employee, and any continued actions of a similar manner have the possibility of creating a hostile work environment or other legal liabilities, which the county cannot tolerate."

The letter also claims that Thompson's Salem-based attorney, David Kramer, threatened to pursue legal action against the county if the board attempted to meet about the subject again. Martin writes that there would be "no legal basis for a declaratory judgment or temporary restraining order in this situation."

### Fear of retaliation

In a July email with The Daily Astorian about the investigation, Thompson claimed that both she and county staff have a fear of retaliation if they publicly express their concerns

about county government. Moore has since called for an investigation into the claim.

"We follow up on all employee concerns. This one sort of came to us in a little bit different way than we might typically hear about it," Moore said at a September meeting. "It's a little bit vague to me about what the concerns are, and I was particularly concerned about anybody having any fears of retaliation. I don't think anybody should ever have to worry about that."

It was not the first time Thompson had criticized Moore, who was hired by commissioners last year in hopes that he would create more executive stability. She and Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan questioned in May whether or not commissioners were sufficiently active in county decision-making.

Commissioner Lisa Clement, as well as Nebeker, defended Moore on Wednesday. She also suggested that clearer policies regarding commissioners' behavior with staff be adopted in the future.

"It concerns me when the line between commissioners' roles and county employees is crossed," Clement said. "It concerns me that things have become so awry that our manager is placed in a position to inform us that he needs to protect his staff from contact with the board."



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