

Subject: Addressing Recent Developments Concerning the Manatee Republican Executive Committee

Dear Committee Members,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to you today because, until now, I have not had the opportunity to speak directly on my own behalf regarding recent events affecting our committee. I believe this is the best way to share my perspective at this time.

My name is Trent Wayman, and I have been a proud member of the Manatee Republican Executive Committee (MREC) since February 2021. During this period, I have attended all but two meetings.

Regrettably, our committee has faced significant challenges due to a lack of effective leadership. The previous administration failed to deliver meaningful results, and in some cases, their actions were detrimental. For example, our treasury collected less than \$100, while expenditures exceeded \$100,000. Additionally, the management of the REC was marred by issues such as proxy voting via phone for Chair elections, unauthorized expenditures, theft of personal property, and mistreatment of members. These problems culminated in the resignations of our Treasurer and Secretary toward the end of 2023.

In response to these difficulties and the approaching Presidential Election, in late 2023 we established a chapter of the Republican Assembly in Manatee County (RAMC). This initiative aimed to build a network of engaged individuals committed to our shared values—something our previous REC struggled to accomplish due to leadership challenges.

The last successful meeting of our Manatee REC was in May 2024; in fact, that was the only meeting held under the previous Chair in 2024. Other gatherings were special meetings called by signatures from 40% of the membership or by the Vice Chair, all conducted according to the rules. However, these meetings were later nullified by the RPOF because the Chairman “deemed” them “null and void.”

In June 2024, I submitted candidate oaths to serve as a Precinct Committeeman and also filed to run for State Committeeman. I am honored to have been elected by 60% of the primary vote in Manatee County to represent our party at the state level.

Because we didn't have a functioning REC, and our Chair was campaigning for a seat on the County Commission, there was no REC activity related to the elections at all. In 2024, the most consequential election ever, the MREC had no involvement or presence. Republican Assembly Manatee County (RAMC) took the lead in the Primary, conducting candidate interviews, voting as a group on whom to support, and handling all the necessary work to back our candidates. RAMC purchased its' own materials

with its' own funds—no outside donors, only grassroots contributions. RAMC formed teams and covered the most active polling places every day of the primary before the polls opened until after they closed.

The results were outstanding. Every single candidate that RAMC backed in the primary won, with the exception of one school board race. Of those candidates, all went on to win their general elections except for the school board race winner, who secured his primary.

However, shortly after the primary, MREC members received notice that the RPOF had used the Grievance Process to suspend our REC. The stated reason was that there were "too many grievances" to process and determine what had occurred. I personally know most of the Executive Committee Members and can attest that the claim of an unmanageable number of grievances is unfounded. I am confident that the RPOF's assertion will not hold up under scrutiny.

As part of the turnaround plan, the RPOF sent a Field Director to Manatee with some campaign materials. The Field Director was very friendly and even though everyone was skeptical because he was sent by the RPOF, I reached out to him and we met. I convinced our members to bring him into the fold and work together for the general election. Again, there was no REC so it was mostly the Republican Assembly now working alongside other Republican Clubs to educate voters during early voting. The RPOF provided signs and campaign materials for us to use which we appreciated very much. I was one of a few instrumental people leading the early voting efforts.

Early November just after the election, Eddie Speir stopped by Manatee REC HQ where he talked with the field director. Eddie requested a meeting with SCW Elect Heisse, SCW Elect Wayman, Chairwoman Culbreath, Field Director Hoffman, and himself to see if we could help facilitate getting the MREC back online. That meeting was scheduled for Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup>. At that meeting we discussed past issues and how to move forward. At the end we agreed to write up a resolution which we all would sign, basically just stating that we wanted to move forward (see attached doc).

On January 6<sup>th</sup>, we held a countywide Republican meeting in honor of J6. That evening, Jacki Heisse (Elected SCW) and I were informed that our names had been omitted from the Congressional Caucus meetings scheduled for Friday at the annual RPOF meeting. On the 7<sup>th</sup>, I emailed Evan Power and Bill Helmich about the issue but received no response from either of them. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, I reached out to National Committeewoman Kathy King, who then forwarded my concern to Evan and Bill; however, there was still no response. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, SCW Heisse ran into National Committeeman Gruters and asked him why our names had been omitted. Within a few hours, SCW Heisse and I both received a text from Bill Helmich stating that Evan Power wanted to meet with us on the 10<sup>th</sup> at 11 a.m. in a conference room at the Rosen Hotel, where the annual event was being held.

SCW Heisse and I arrived at the conference room to find Evan, Bill, and Alex waiting for us. The first thing Evan told us was that we were “fully credentialed,” but we weren’t granted voting rights, meaning we could only attend and listen. The reason given was that, because we didn’t have an REC, we lacked voting rights. Our argument was that we were elected by Manatee County voters, not by an REC, and we were there to represent all of Manatee County, not just the REC. No valid response was provided to us. The rest of that meeting’s discussion is irrelevant because nothing changed; Manatee County Voters voices were silenced and rights were stripped away.

After that meeting, before the CD Caucus meeting, I had a chance to review the proceedings from the Caucus meetings. Upon reviewing them, I realized what was really going on. SCW Heisse and I were the only two RPOF members qualified to run for Chair and Vice Chair in the first round for CD16, and by default, it would have been us as Chair and Vice Chair. It now seems very likely to me that the true reason we were stripped of our rights was because they did not want either of us on the Executive Board.

There was no direct communication from the RPOF after that. The next message we received was an email (attached PDF) informing us that we had been removed as REC members from the Manatee REC and that our SCW and SCM seats were now vacant. The following day, another email surfaced, stating that new board members and SCM/SCW had been elected by the RPOF. Coincidentally, the new SCM is a long-time friend of Evan and was part of his wedding party, along with Mr. Helmich. If that isn’t good ol’ boys, then what is?

In summary, I want to leave you with these points:

- The REC was abruptly shut down due to claims of “too many grievances,” which is likely false. These grievances, primarily related to the former Chair, were minimal and could have been addressed transparently. The notion that there were numerous unresolved issues is unsubstantiated, especially considering no inquiries were made to those involved.
- Our team was actively involved in the recent primaries and general elections, performing essential campaign work. The RPOF’s decision to shut us out appears to be a response to grassroots candidates outperforming establishment-backed candidates.
- Evan Power informed us that multiple law enforcement agencies were investigating alleged fraud within the REC, specifically concerning our former treasurer. He claimed that the governor’s legal office was involved and suggested potential arrests. However, months have passed without any charges or official reports. Evan also told us that our former Vice Chair committed burglary but what he fails to mention is that there was a law enforcement officer present at the time the VC was having the locks changed and no charges were ever filed for that either.

- Both Jacki and I were excluded from the RPOF roster at the annual meeting, effectively preventing us from serving on the Executive Board. Given our roles, we were the only eligible candidates for leadership positions within the CD16 Caucus, which suggests a deliberate effort to suppress dissenting voices.
- Recently, we received notice that we were removed from the REC and that our State Committee seats were declared vacant—without a hearing, evidence, or due process. No formal charges were presented, which raises serious concerns about transparency and fairness.
- You’ve been fed a narrative and expected to believe it without an ounce of proof. I know this to be true because I have been here the whole time and know what really happened. If there were any evidence to support their claims, they would have already been produced. Any negative statements I’ve made are a result of negative actions taken against our membership.

The RPOF has caused serious reputational damage to both the County and the State Party during the tenures of Evan Power and Bill Helmich. I wish you good luck in fixing it, but I’m not sure there’s enough courage to make that happen.

I appreciate your time and consideration in this matter and am hopeful for a path forward that restores transparency, accountability, and unity within our committee.

Sincerely,

Trent Wayman  
Duly Elected Manatee County State Committeeman



REC Meeting  
11-15-24.docx



2025.03.13 Letter of  
Removal\_Trent Way