

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

Idaho House of Representatives - House Ethics on House Policy Committee Meeting

Witness: Representative Megan Blanksma

Date and Time: April 14, 2021, 4:00 p.m. (MST)

Location: Idaho Attorney General's Office Conference Room

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Dixon: Thank you for joining us Representative Blanskma. Is there anybody in this room you're not familiar with that I may need to introduce you to?

Blanksma: No. Well, do you know him? Is he new? [Laughter].

Dixon: Okay. (Inaudible).

Unknown Male: The other people resigned.

Dixon: So, I've, we've asked you here to explain your interaction with some previous incidents we've heard with Representative von Ehlinger. And maybe actions that you've asked other Representatives to take to try and mitigation those. So if you could share your knowledge and out of respect we would appreciate it.

Blanksma: I don't know where you want me to start. I guess.

Dixon: Well, we, we, um, perhaps earlier than we anticipated, which would be the special session. We had heard in other testimony that someone was asked to speak to him during the special session about a rumored interaction that, that would be a good place to start. Because I think there were two instances that were mentioned to us that you gave direction or asked for help from a Representative in.

Blanksma: I don't recall giving any direction during special session. I was aware of an incident that apparently happened during special session, but that reported later as a combination with an incident that was reported during session.

Dixon: Okay. Would you mind describing that to us?

Blanksma: So, an individual who's not a Representative came to me and I don't know, I prefer not to give detail if at all possible. A woman, came to me, not a Representative. It was easier to talk to me than probably to go to the Speaker. And um, she relayed an incident to me about special session. About how um, Representative von Ehlinger, she felt as if he were pursuing

her one night when everybody was out. I don't know the details of what out meant. They were out and um, she as if, and, and again this is, was relayed to me. Um she felt as if he followed her toward the bathroom and felt very uncomfortable with as close as she was, he was trying to get to her. And um, decided to kind of just, not worry about it at that time. Hoping that it was misunderstood. Then during session, so that was relayed to me, this is the same conversation. Then she said the reason I want to tell you about that is because and at the time it was the night before that she was coming to me to talk about. And the night before there was a reception. He was one of the individuals at the reception. Apparently there was some sort of, I don't know whether they were around a fire pit or a table, and she because he made her feel uncomfortable in the past, she still felt uncomfortable around him. She tried several times to move away. He continued to follow. Another, a Senator actually tried to kind of limit. I don't know how to...run interference is probably the best way to put it. And um, and was trying to help the situation as best he could. She felt really uncomfortable. And then at the end of the night what had her frustrated upset. I don't know how to categorize her feelings cause their hers, was that she was concerned cause her purse had been dumped over and she wasn't sure that it, if it had been rifled through and then I guess to describe her state of mind with regard to the individual, she was concerned that maybe he found out what her home address was.

Dixon: Is that what led you to ask the other Representative to interact with him?

Blanksma: I thought based upon so, yes. That, yes. That and some other rumors that I'd heard, but didn't confirm.

Dixon: Okay. Question?

Horman: Are you able to share those other rumors?

Blanksma: Well, I ...

Horman: Or at what level are you?

Blanksma: At the time I, there were rumors that he attempted to, to have an interaction with one of the staff members. That staff member however, did not come to me. It just. The one that came to me was the one that I relayed to you.

Dixon: Representative Davis.

Davis: Thank you. So, thank you Mr. Chair. Just the first person was not a staff member?

Blanksma: The person who came to my office to report it works in the building, is not a House staff member.

Davis: Okay. But works in the building?

Blanksma: Works in the building. Is not a Representative so.

Dixon: Representative Horman.

Horman: Can you give us any idea of maybe the power differential between Representative von Ehlinger and this person? Or is there a power differential?

Blanksma: Yeah. It was a lobbyist. Who relies on Representative votes to make a living.

Myers: Were you talking Representative, about the power dynamic between the first individual or the rumored second story that she was telling?

Blanksma: The first one, yeah.

Myers: Okay. What about the second story that, rumor about?

Blanksma: That was the rumor that I heard was the staff.

Myers: Okay and do you see that there's a power differential between a staff member and an elected official?

Blanksma: I would say yes.

Dixon: Go ahead.

Horman: Did you ever communicate any of this to anyone else on the leadership team? To the Speaker, the Majority Leader?

Blanksma: I was asked not to share by the individual who came to me. And that's why I'm trying to be very careful because if this becomes public.

Dixon: So it was relayed to us that you asked a Representative on two separate occasions to go speak to Representative von Ehlinger.

Blanksma: I don't remember two separate occasions. That doesn't mean that it didn't happen, it means I remember one.

Crane: And that was in this session? You asked a Representative? Okay.

Blanksma: Correct.

Davis: In defense. He said the first one was just a passing by kind of casual, so she may not very well remember it. Member he said (inaudible) it was just like a passing (inaudible). I though she mentioned to him anyways.

Blanksma: You're going to have to help me out her guys.

Dixon: And then it was also relayed to that the Representative came and confronted you about the information you had received. Is that true?

Blanksma: That is accurate. So I had asked another Representative that had had some difficulties with allegations in the past to maybe relay his story so that Representative von Ehlinger would be mindful of his behavior in light of past events. How bout that?

Dixon: Well said.

Blanksma: And um, so he that Representative and I believe with his, I think it was with a woman that he's, I don't even know whether they're dating or if they're working on getting married. Are they financed? I think that's a question for all of us, but they, they went together, so the two of them went together and had lunch with Representative von Ehlinger and both kind of relayed how frustrating that was to have you know, an allegation so you want to be really careful with interactions with folks that aren't other Representatives that might be construed as, as maybe inappropriate. Whatever your intentions are, be careful. That was, so then that was reported back to me. Hey, I did what you asked me to do. I said hey thank you. I appreciate your time. And then after that lunch, and then Representative von Ehlinger came up to my office to confront me about it and um, how much do you want...

Crane: Could you relay that conversation between the two of you?

Blanksma: It's, it's, I normally I'm a copious note taker and I didn't take any notes and now I regret it. I remembered a couple things over the conversation. I remember he came in and he asked if it was O.K. to shut the door. Normally I don't care. So fine. I sat behind my desk and um, he said, he said that James, sorry the other Representative had, had taken. I'm trying to be careful cause I don't want to throw anyone under the bus. So he came in. He wanted to know if I had set that up. I said yes. I was trying to give you some perspective because you don't want to have the situation that other people have gotten involved with and I'm trying to help you out here. Before you get to a point where you end up in a similar situation. He made a comment about well you know he was single, tall, blond, good looking guy and you know, sometimes people take things the wrong way. And I've got a family picture behind me and I said yeah, I know what those look like,

that's not the issue. I've got two of them that live in my house. I said you just really need to be careful. And that's what James was trying to relay. And he said well what have, who made the comment or who made the complaint? And I said I don't feel comfortable sharing that with you. They've asked me not share it with anyone. It's not been reported because it was something that made them uncomfortable and they preferred to remain anonymous and just asked that I, if there was something that I could do. This was the path I chose, maybe it was. Right now I'm feeling like maybe it was the wrong one. He, additionally he wanted details on what was reported. Names, details, and I said no. I said just take, try to take what was told to you. He then asked, well was it because of, of some sort of touching incident. And I said no. That wasn't what was reported to me. And then he proceeded to tell me about the staff member that he found interesting that was the rumor that I had, I think, I mean I'm guessing cause I'm starting to put two and two together at this point. A staff member asked me at what point it was appropriate to gifts and that. I told him again it, be careful and this probably wasn't the place for that and, and that's. And I kept repeating because that was the situation that I remembered was with those, you know, all three of those guys ending up in the newspaper through accusations that and it, it hurt. And so I was trying to tell him here's the, are experience with it. If at all possible try to avoid it. And so that was to the best of my recollection that's how the conversation went.

Dixon: Did you feel threatened in any way?

Blanksma: I felt uncomfortable.

Dixon: I just think your tone of voice and reactions and things.

Blanksma: I felt uncomfortable.

Dixon: Representative Crane.

Crane: Thank you Mr. Chairman and Representative Blanksma. In that conversation he asked you about if it involved touching. Did he name who that employee was, or that individual was?

Blanksma: That was all of the quote. It was well did it involve touching. And I, it caught me off guard because that wasn't what I, what had come to my door. I guess. And so I didn't, I didn't ask for elaboration cause you know, I, at that point

Dixon: Don't want the details.

Blanksma: I don't the...

Crane: Just to follow-up on the conversation on giving gifts, was there, was there more to that conversation about giving gifts that you could elaborate on?

Blanksma: If I remember correctly, and again I feel, cause this is, if I remember correctly it was with regard to a birthday and whether it'd be appropriate to give someone a birthday present.

Crane: Kay. Thank you.

Blanksma: And if I remember, again, I'm trying my best if I remember correctly.

Dixon: That's great.

Crane: Great.

Dixon: Any other questions?

Kane: So Mr. Chairman, can I ask a question?

Dixon: Yes, please.

Kane: Did the Representative, did he accept your advice or was it more of a defensive posture?

Blanksma: Well. I hate to attribute you know, any particular attitude to him but, it was, he was defensive when he came upstairs and I don't know that he appreciated the effort or the spirit in which the suggestion was made. And there was push back at, I felt, and that's all I can speak to, is I felt that he pushing back on me even suggesting that path forward.

Myers: Can I ask a question?

Kane: Thanks for the question.

Dixon: Yes Mr. Myers.

Myers: Did you have any, after had the confrontation with the Representative, did you have a follow-up discussion with the Representative that suggested talk to him. Did you to compare notes afterwards?

Blanksma: If I remember correctly, the original before I spoke with Mr. or Representative von Ehlinger in my office I got a text from that Representative. If I remember correctly. And then later, I think it was the next day, maybe it was later that day, but I believe it was the next day I spoke with the Representative yeah, that took him to lunch and he relayed

to me how that conversation went. And that's how I found out that there were three people at that lunch.

Myers: And was there anything more beyond that conversation in a way of follow-up?

Blanksma: Beyond just the kind of sum of this is what I said, this is what we did. Not that I remember.

Dixon: Representative Horman.

Horman: Can I just follow-up on that? Do you have any recollection at all if um, it was relayed to you? Like if he was defensive or accepting? Do you have any sense or recollection at all of if there was belief that this would impact future behavior or if it was kind of um...

Blanksma: From the Representative that took him out to lunch?

Horman: Um hm.

Blanksma: I didn't feel overly encouraged. [Laughter.] By the report I got back. Is that fair.

Dixon: Representative Davis.

Davis: Would it be right or fair to say that you say some red flags and that's why you were trying to do this? They'd been brought to you. There were red flags that were and that's why you were trying to alert to?

Blanksma: I've. Well clearly there was a report to me which had enough of a red flag in, in my not overwhelmingly long career in this building. There was, I knew of an incident where people ended up in press. And so I maybe my fellow Republicans don't feel this way, but I do try to really hard to keep us all out of trouble. I, really hard. And so I take that seriously and so that was the, that was the effort.

Dixon: Anything else? Thank you.

Crane: We are still in the investigation phase so this is all confidential.

Blanksma: Yeah, cause I like talking about it clearly, so. I wasn't here. [Laughter.]