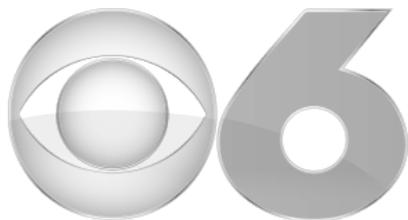


'I am spending the money appropriately,' insists Richmond school board member

POSTED 10:50 PM, MARCH 18, 2015, BY CHELSEA RARRICK, UPDATED AT 11:37PM, MARCH 19, 2015



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RICHMOND, Va. -- As CBS 6 first reported in November 2014, Richmond School Board Members are allowed \$15,000 each, annually, to spend on travel, teacher appreciation events, and district meetings. The money covers out of town conferences, gas money for transport to and from school board meetings.

This funding, a \$135,000 a year divided among the nine members, is covered by taxpayers. Now there are new concerns about how some board members are spending that money.

For example, Tichi Pinkney-Eppes expensed a catering bill for a 9th district parent check-in meeting that took place back in November. Eppes had the company, which is located in Henrico County, make enough food for 100 people at a cost of nearly \$1,100.

However, just barely over a dozen people attended, and most of the food went untouched, according to a source in attendance.

"I think to the extent that we are trying to communicate with our constituents, doing community town hall meetings, presentations is a good thing," said School Board Member, Jeff Bourne/ "But when you look at where we are from a fiscal standpoint and our budget needs, perhaps spend \$1,000 on food for one events is not the wisest use of taxpayer dollars."

Eppes was contacted by email and phone but could not be reached. After no response, CBS 6 reporter Chelsea Rarrick caught up with her at a school board work session Tuesday night.

"We were told only a few people showed up, that it was nowhere near 100 people," Rarrick said to Eppes.

"Well what I would say to that, is that it as approved, I planned on having that many people there and because it had already been approved you couldn't not not pay for it," said Eppes.

Eppes said the meeting was to educate parents about Title 1 schools but could not give an estimate as to how many people were there.

"I am spending the money appropriately," said Eppes.

Board member Shonda Harris-Muhammed has also ordered food for school events, but said she tries to be frugal.

"It's not our money to spend," said Harris-Muhammed, "So, I have to be very strategic when I plan anything, particularly my 'chat and chews!'"

Bourne said the board needs to make sure all members are spending money in the most appropriate way.

"I think we have to continue to look at our policies and make sure we have the proper checks and balances."

After speaking with Eppes Tuesday night, she had scheduled another interview through the clerk for Wednesday afternoon.

She cancelled but sent us this statement saying :

"In accordance with policy and as approved by the board, in November of last year, I planned a parent engagement opportunity "community check in" for the purposes of educating parents about Title I schools and the resources available to them in supporting their children's education.

The opportunity was open to the public and was planned for accordingly knowing there are at least 3,500 students represented in 6 Title I designated schools in the 9th district.

Breakfast and lunch was provided as a part of the "community check in." The services were rendered and therefore were appropriately invoiced for payment.

There are some great things happening across RPS and I look forward to your continued coverage as we build a better school district. Please join me and the community for another check in at Huguenot High School on Saturday, April 18, 2015. I will gladly share more information with you about this "community check in" as activities for the day are finalized."

Eppes also mentioned another school board member's trip to Nashville for a conference. Kristen Larson said she plans to utilize the time at the conference and says this is her first overnight trip since taking office.

Kristen Larson, Fourth District, said she plans to utilize the time at the conference and said this is her first overnight trip since taking office. According to receipts, the total cost for the trip, including airfare, comes to a little over \$2,800.

Board member Mamie Taylor also spent money on food for district meetings. Taylor said she had a good turnout at her meetings and all who attended ate the food provided.



PROBLEM SOLVERS

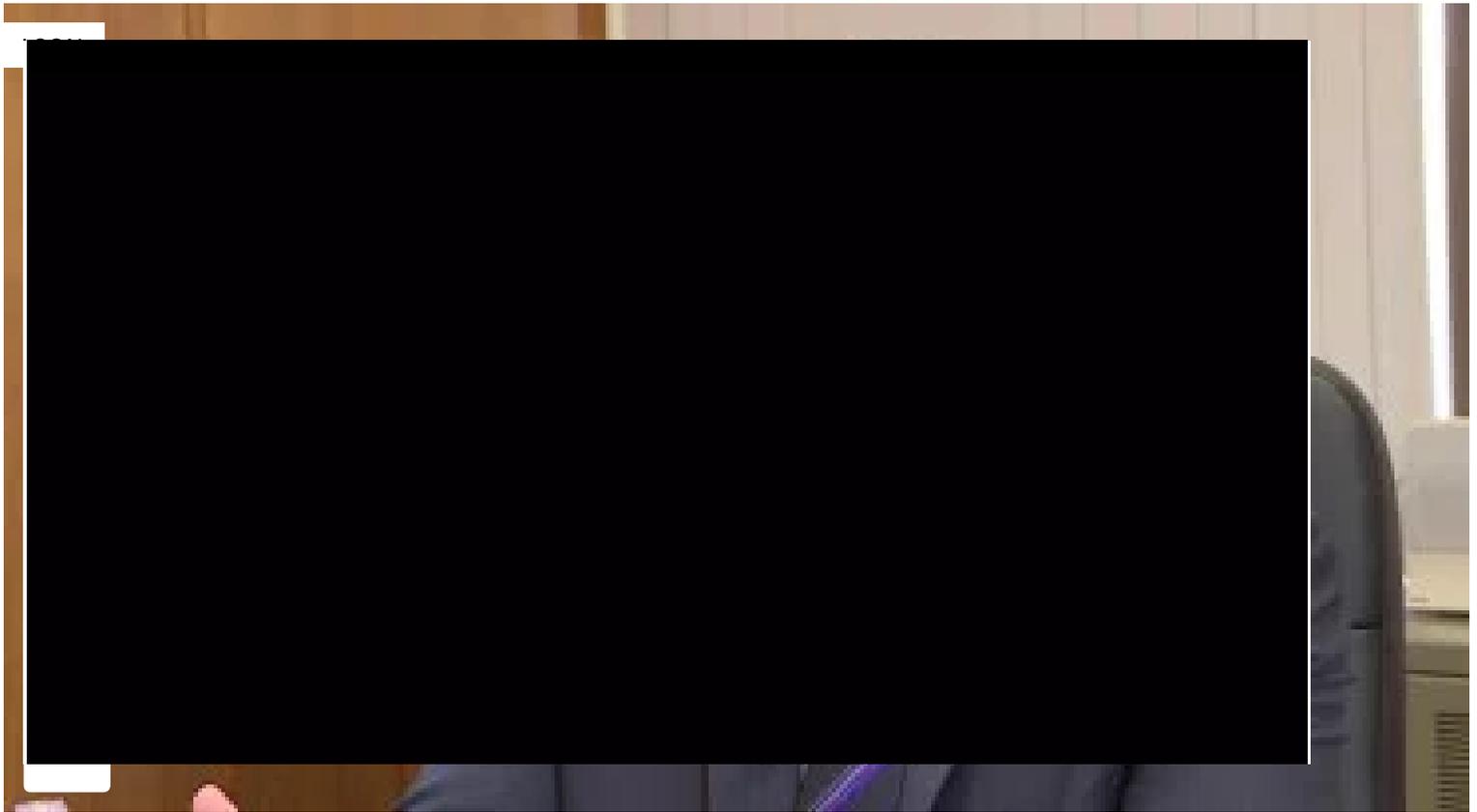


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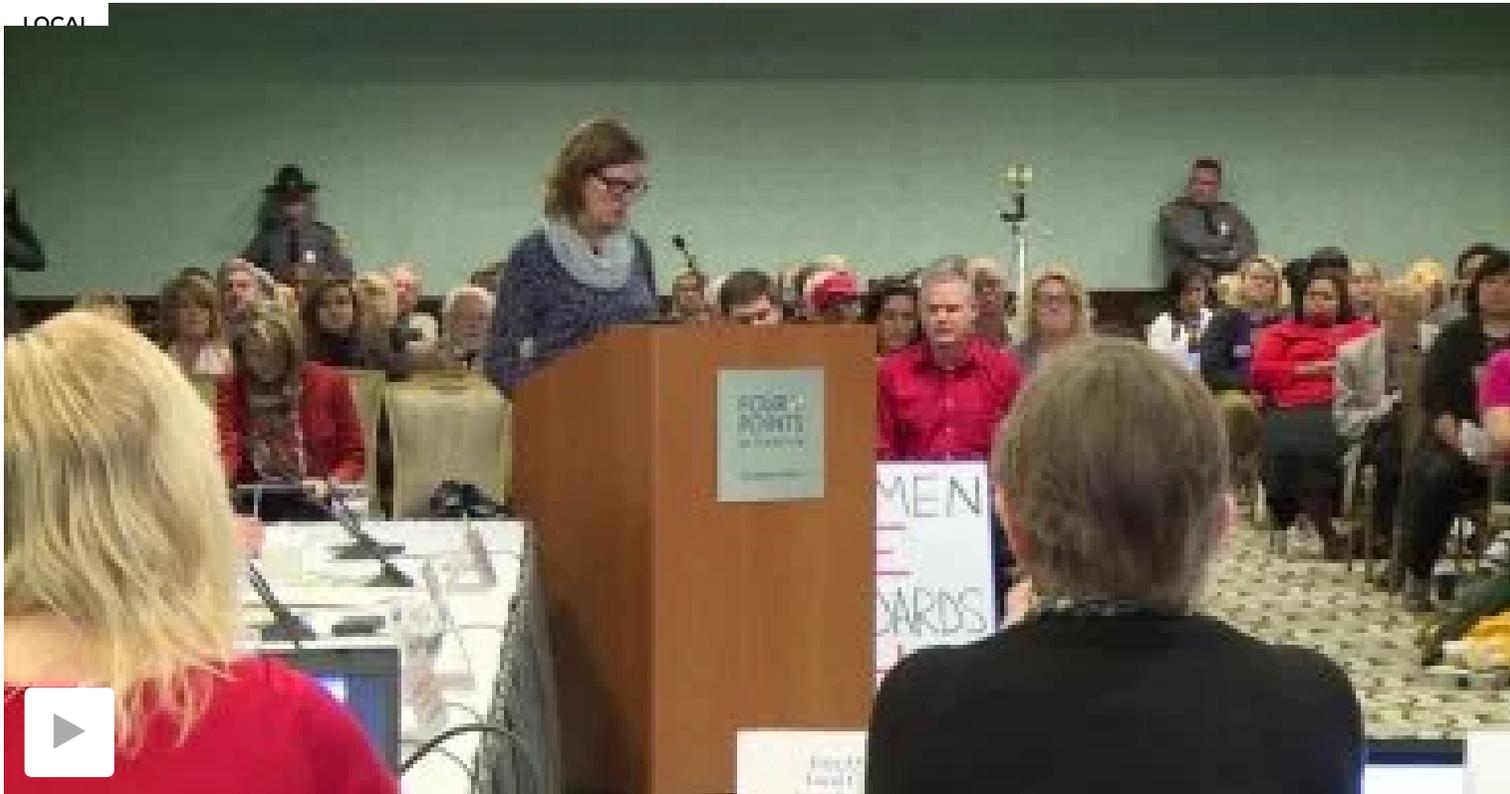
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