

Dear Representative ██████,

In January of 2020 I started my 28th year as an Officer of the Arkansas State Capitol Police, an office of the Arkansas Secretary of State. I had been the Chief of that department for 15 of those 28 years and I had high hopes for the future. Not only for my personal life, but also for my professional life. I never would have believed the changes that would come so quickly or how quickly the true character of people would be revealed as the days went by. I watched as our nation, state, and its people changed so quickly and so fast. I watched as my chosen profession came under attack from many professional people, the media, and from even the citizenry I tried to serve. I also watched as politics and the true character of people became crystal clear.

It concerned me in seeing the mistrust people had in each other and the lack of true concern for just doing the right thing. These things didn't start overnight, but they steadily grew.

I had always believed it took a whole team of people working together to overcome any issue. It all comes down to just doing what is right and when people cannot do that, they fail to be successful.

Shortly after the year began, actions were taken by members of Secretary of State John Thurston's executive staff toward employees of the State Capitol Police that caused me great concern. I didn't want to believe John Thurston was a part of those actions, but John Thurston's lack of leadership and/or concern did not prevent or stop those actions from happening. This proved to me that he had a lack of leadership and / or control of his management team or John Thurston agreed with what took place.

I had worked for the Office of the Secretary of State for 28 years, under four previous Secretaries of State and had never seen an employee or myself treated with such disdain. The State Capitol of Arkansas, the facility that I had protected for years, had literally been attacked during the riots happening in Little Rock in early 2020 and I myself and my fellow officers were being attacked for just being law enforcement officers. I couldn't believe the person elected to the office designated for the upkeep and care of the Arkansas State Capitol had basically not said a word. He had made no forceful statement about the attacks on the State Capitol. Never did he publicly denounce those events and express that they would not be tolerated. John Thurston was basically a no show. I remember standing on the steps of the State Capitol facing a riotous crowd and calling him to request the Governor for assistance. He called the Governor and then called me back and told me the Governor said he couldn't do anything. I called the Governor myself and within an hour I had one hundred State Troopers arriving for help. The seriousness of my request was either not understood by the Secretary of State or he had a lack of true concern for the seriousness of the situation. When I was summoned to testify before the Joint Committee of City, County, and Local Affairs on what had occurred during the riots at the State Capitol, I was shocked that the Secretary of State himself was not there beside me, to support his police and present a forceful response as to what had occurred. After these events and the legislative meeting had occurred, I felt my access to the man I called my boss was purposely being limited. I could sense my time was coming to an end and possible to a few others.

It all came to realization on Friday September 25, 2020. On that day the true character of the Secretary of State and his staff was revealed to me. I was directed by members of John Thurston's executive staff to fire an Officer of the Arkansas State Capitol Police. I had investigated an officer of my department because of an anonymous complaint that I believed to be generated within the office and possibly by the executive office itself. I was directed to conduct this investigation by the chief legal counsel of the Secretary of State. I conducted the investigation and proved the - so called - anonymous complaint was false and the officer had not done what he was accused of doing. I presented this evidence and the results of my investigation and the suspicions I had concerning the origin of this complaint. I realized the decisions of this administration had already been determined. I was directed to fire this Officer over the telephone, something I have never seen happen, or I have ever done to any State Capitol Police officer in my twenty eight year career. This Secretary of State and his administration gave this officer no due process or even allowed me to give him a reason for this termination. Although I understand the "at will" employment stated for all employees, I believed some sort of due process was still afforded and expected by all employees of the Secretary of State's office. I strongly could see this officer was not afforded any sort of due process, nor was he given a chance to even hear the reasons for his termination. I could not believe John Thurston's administration would operate in this manner nor could I believe John Thurston would sanction this type of action. But he did.

This officer's livelihood was taken from him without his ability to hear any reasons why. His career was stopped basically without explanation or any semblance of due process. The policy of the Secretary of State and Capitol Police afforded the opportunity for the officer to know the reason behind disciplinary measures, but it was apparent this administration would not follow their own policies they established. It was my opinion that no matter how wrong this was, John Thurston himself was responsible for it.

I am not proud of myself for this and I was deeply concerned in the way this was handled. I believe the treatment of this Officer was unfair, wrong, unethical, and counterproductive to the office of the Secretary of State and I requested to speak to the Secretary of State. I was told that would not be allowed so I left the office feeling extremely concerned and troubled. This Secretary of State had led me to believe he would have the most ethical, policy oriented, and lawful administration I had ever worked for, but I knew he expressed his true self in allowing this to happen to this young man. I knew at that moment I would be next. The following Monday my suspicions became real. I was told the administration wanted the police department to go in a new direction, and I would not be going in that direction. Again I was refused a meeting with the Secretary of State. This confirmed my belief that John Thurston himself lacked any leadership in managing his executive staff, any concern for fairness to any of his employees, or even the courage and willingness to hear my concerns. John Thurston was again a no show in doing the right thing.

I write this to you because I am very concerned about the Office of the Secretary of State. The leadership in the office is more important now than it has ever been in our lives.

It is my opinion that the current Secretary of State, John Thurston, is lacking in his ability to lead the office in this most critical time. His willful disregard to even listen to a falsely accused employee and lack of true concern for just doing the right thing should cause great concern for you as well. The lack of his leadership and even presence during the riots that damaged the State Capitol of Arkansas sends a loud message that should not be ignored. It demonstrates the

lack of character and integrity. The State of Arkansas deserves an individual that will be a trusted leader and will be able to effectively do the work of the people. John Thurston has shown me the type of leader he is and the type of people he will have as his staff.

I know John Thurston and his administration will say these are the words of a disgruntled former employee, a typical political response, but these words are much more. They are my words. Words of a very disappointed person in government officials that fail to just do what is right. Actions speak louder than words and this Secretary of States and his executive team's actions speak very loud.

I ask that you re-consider any support you may have for this current Secretary of State. I ask that you consider supporting his appoint Mark Lowery, in the upcoming republican primary election. Integrity needs to be brought back to the office of the Secretary of State.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Darrell S. Hedden". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely".

Darrell S. Hedden
Retired Chief of the State Capitol Police

Please contact me if you have any concerns.

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