

ELECTION PROTEST

Filed Pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. § 163-182.9

To:

Yancey County Board of Elections
Burnsville, North Carolina

From:

Randy Buckner

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Candidate: Randy Buckner

Office Sought: Yancey County Commissioner

Election: Republican Primary Election

Election Date: March 3, 2026

I. Standing to File Protest

I, Randy Buckner, file this election protest pursuant to **N.C. Gen. Stat. § 163-182.9**, which allows a candidate in the election to file a protest concerning the conduct of the election.

This protest concerns multiple irregularities that occurred during the campaign period, early voting, and Election Day in connection with the March 3, 2026 Republican Primary Election for Yancey County

Commissioner. I believe these irregularities, individually and cumulatively, could have affected the outcome of the election.

II. Background of the Election

In the March 3, 2026 Republican Primary Election for Yancey County Commissioner, five Republican candidates appeared on the ballot for three seats:

1. David Grindstaff, incumbent
2. Stacy McIntyre Greene, incumbent
3. Sandi Norton, incumbent
4. Randy Buckner, challenger
5. Jason Silvers, challenger

The three incumbents were serving on the Yancey County Board of Commissioners while actively campaigning to remain on the November general election ballot.

The margin between me, Randy Buckner, and incumbent Sandi Norton was approximately **69 votes**.

Because the margin was so narrow, I believe the irregularities described below could reasonably have influenced enough voters to affect the outcome.

III. Illegal Sample Ballots Distributed During Early Voting and on Election Day

During early voting, beginning February 12, 2026, and continuing throughout the early voting period and on Election Day, documents closely resembling official ballots were distributed to voters at and around the Yancey County Board of Elections location.

These documents were handed out by **Joan Schultz**, who would sit in the Board of Elections parking lot in her white Jeep Wrangler with her dog and hand them to voters going in to vote.

The documents recommended the three incumbents:

- David Grindstaff
- Stacy McIntyre Greene
- Sandi Norton

The wording on the document said:

“Republican Recommended Primary Choices.”

These documents closely resembled official ballots.

Under **G.S. 163-165.2(b)**, no person other than a board of elections may produce or disseminate a document substantially resembling an official ballot unless the document contains on its face a prominent statement that it was **not produced by a board of elections and is not an official ballot**.

The ballots handed out by Joan Schultz and others did **not** contain that required disclaimer. They did not clearly state that they were not produced by the Board of Elections and were not official ballots. Instead, they simply said, “Republican Recommended Primary Choices.”

I believe these sample ballots were illegal and misleading.

IV. Board of Elections Was Notified but Distribution Continued

On the last day of early voting, my daughter, **Brandi Young**, notified **Mary Beth Tipton**, Director of the Yancey County Board of Elections, that Joan Schultz was handing out illegal sample ballots.

Mary Beth Tipton asked Brandi for a copy, and Brandi sent it to her.

After that, Mary Beth Tipton came outside with a paper called “**sample ballot disclaimer**” with the statute printed on it and handed it out. At that point, **candidate Sandi Norton** and **Nancy Grindstaff Ogle**, David Grindstaff’s mother, were present and handing out ballots.

Even after the issue was brought to the attention of the Board of Elections, the illegal ballots were not switched out, and the distribution continued. Nothing effective was done to stop them from being handed out that day or on Election Day.

I believe that allowing the continued distribution of those ballots after the Board of Elections had been notified is a serious election irregularity.

V. Countywide and Digital Distribution of the Illegal Ballots

These same illegal sample ballots were not confined to the polling location. They were circulated all around the county on the last day of early voting and on Election Day.

They were also distributed digitally through:

- mass texts sent by the Yancey County Republicans, with pictures of the sample ballot
- personal texts sent by Joan Schultz to friends
- social media posts containing images of the ballot

Because these sample ballots looked like official ballots and lacked the proper disclaimer, I believe voters could easily have mistaken them for official or Board-approved guidance.

Given the approximately 69-vote margin, I believe it is very easy to conclude that 69 or more voters could have been persuaded by those illegal ballots.

VI. Parking Lot Activity and Interference on the Last Day of Early Voting

On the last day of early voting, Saturday, February 28, 2026, I arrived at the Yancey County Board of Elections to set up and greet voters.

When I got there, there was a **white Honda Odyssey minivan** parked next to the wooden storage building on Board of Elections property. I assumed it belonged to someone helping with early voting, so I parked my truck next to it in front of the Rio dumpster.

A little later, **Joan Schultz** arrived in her Jeep. A few minutes later, **David Grindstaff** and **April Grindstaff** appeared and talked to Joan. David then got into the white minivan and moved it so Joan could pull in.

Later that day, an older man in a **black Jetta** pulled up where I was standing beside my truck and asked if he could get into the dumpster area for just a minute. I asked him how long he would stay, and he said just a minute. I backed my truck out.

While I was sitting in my truck with the window down, he parked, got out, looked at me, and said:

“Politics are hell, ain’t they, Randy?”

At that point I realized it was **Jim McFarland**, who dates **Nancy Grindstaff Ogle**, David Grindstaff’s mother.

I also observed **Nancy Grindstaff Ogle** step across the electioneering buffer line, and I have a picture of that.

Later that same day, David Grindstaff sent one of his younger employees up in the white minivan to park directly in front of my truck in a way that blocked me from being able to campaign effectively and made it harder for voters to approach me.

After the white van left, **Jim McFarland** came back in a **white Ford truck** and parked in the exact same spot, again blocking the area so voters could not easily approach me.

All the while, **Joan Schultz** and **Nancy Grindstaff Ogle** continued to approach voters and hand out the illegal sample ballots during early voting.

I believe these actions could very well have deterred potential voters from talking to me and learning about my candidacy, and I believe this should be investigated as part of the cumulative effect of the irregularities in this election.

Board of Elections employees, including Mary Beth Tipton and Brooklyn Hensley witness these events.

VII. Use of County Seal, County Office, and Official Appearance in Campaign Materials

During the campaign period, the three incumbent commissioners, **David Grindstaff, Stacy McIntyre Greene, and Sandi Norton**, posed together for photographs inside the **county commissioner's office**, beneath the **Yancey County seal**, using the appearance of official county office space and county symbolism.

Those photos were used in campaign-related materials and created the appearance that **Yancey County government supported or endorsed those three candidates**.

These photographs appeared in the **Yancey Common Times Journal** on:

- January 21
- February 8
- February 11

They also appeared on social media.

When three incumbents who are running for reelection take photos together in the county commissioner office under the county seal and put those images in the paper and online, it creates the appearance that the county government itself supports them as the official or preferred candidates.

I believe that appearance could easily sway voters.

VIII. Sandi Norton and Kenzie Norton Social Media Posts Using the County Seal and County Office

On **January 14, 2026**, **Sandi Norton** posted on her personal Facebook page a picture of the three incumbents together in the county commissioner office under the county seal.

Her caption said:

“Please go vote for your true Republicans.”

That post received approximately:

- 77 likes/reactions
- 6 comments

- 8 shares

That same post was shared by her daughter, **Kenzie Victoria Norton**, and Kenzie's post received approximately 9 likes/reactions.

Because the photograph showed the three incumbent commissioners together inside the official county commissioner office under the county seal while telling voters to vote for their "true Republicans," it looked like **Yancey County Government supported those three candidates**.

County governments do not endorse candidates in elections. Yet this image created the appearance of endorsement and could easily have influenced voters.

Joyce Anglin also liked that post, which I discuss further below.

IX. Concerns Regarding Open Meetings and Quorum Activity Related to Official-Looking Political Content

When the three incumbent commissioners gathered together for the official-looking photo under the county seal in the commissioner office, that also raised concerns for me about open meetings and quorum issues.

Likewise, later county videos featured all or most commissioners together in ways that appeared to involve a quorum, without any advertised public meeting.

I am raising these concerns because when sitting commissioners appear together in official county settings using county symbols, it does not look like ordinary campaigning. It looks like official county business, and voters may interpret it that way.

Per North Carolina General Statute §163-99.

The Government Cannot Endorse a Candidate

Even when buildings are used for political purposes:

- The **government itself cannot endorse a candidate.**
- Public facilities **cannot be used in a way that implies official endorsement.**

This is where **county seals, offices, and official imagery become problematic.**

It Applies to Meetings — Not Campaign Advertising

The statute is primarily about **allowing political meetings in public facilities.**

It **does not authorize:**

- Campaign photo shoots inside government offices
- Using the **county seal in campaign materials**
- Using **government staff or resources for campaigning**

Those activities can still raise issues under election law or ethics rules.

It is reasonable to believe that by using the County Commissioner office, and the Yancey County seal, at least 69 voters could have been swayed to think the incumbent candidates were recommended by Yancey County. This is a misuse of office and abuse of power by the ones who allowed it. Since the three incumbents formed a quorum, one could assume they are the ones who approved it.

X. Chairman Jeff Whitson's Use of the Official Yancey County Local Government Facebook Page During Campaign Season

I also want to bring to the attention of the Board the use of the **official Yancey County Local Government Facebook page** by **Jeff Whitson**, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, during campaign season.

If you look back at 2025, there were very few videos done. But starting in January 2026, during election season, Chairman Whitson began putting out a series of videos on the official county government Facebook page featuring himself, incumbent commissioners, and county employees.

These did not simply provide neutral public information. In my view, they subtly promoted the sitting commissioners and their accomplishments during an active election cycle.

The videos included the following:

January 7, 2026

Jeff Whitson, Mark Ledford, and County Manager **Lynn Austin** did a video in the county commissioner office under the county seal reflecting on the accomplishments and challenges of 2025 and moving forward into 2026.

January 14, 2026

Jeff Whitson and all four other commissioners, including the incumbent candidates, did a walkthrough video in the Sheriff's Office / 911 building. All five commissioners were there. You could see them talking, although the audio was covered by overlay. That formed a quorum, and no open meeting was advertised.

January 21, 2026

Jeff Whitson and the other commissioners, including incumbents Sandi Norton and Stacy McIntyre Greene, did another walkthrough video of the Ray Court building. Again, you could see them talking. No meeting was posted, and this also formed a quorum.

In addition, regarding the January 14 and January 21 videos, I learned from **Pat Randolph** that articles were sent from the county commissioner office to the **Yancey Common Times Journal**. I do not know whether these were written by the county manager, the clerk, or someone else, but they discussed the walkthroughs and videos. One article featured a quote from incumbent **Sandi Norton**, and another featured a quote from incumbent **Stacy McIntyre Greene**.

February 4, 2026

Jeff Whitson and County Manager Lynn Austin did another video talking about how well the county was doing.

February 20, 2026

Jeff Whitson and **Chris Sigmon**, the part-time county planner, did a video on upcoming county projects.

February 27, 2026

Jeff Whitson and Lynn Austin did a video on SDR debris cleanup and talked about putting misinformation allegedly put out by candidates "to bed."

February 28, 2026

Jeff Whitson and Lynn Austin posted another video on the official county local government page talking about FEMA and rebuilding the Toe River Campground.

Between January 7 and Election Day, Chairman Jeff Whitson put out seven videos, often with County Manager Lynn Austin, on the official county government page during the campaign season.

I believe this was subtle campaigning using Yancey County Local Government and its resources, including county employees such as Lynn Austin and Chris Sigmon, in a way that could easily influence at least 69 voters to support the incumbent candidates.

XI. County Financial Audit Withheld Before the Election While Officials Claimed the County Was Doing Well

Another issue that I believe influenced voters was the handling of the county's annual financial audit.

North Carolina requires counties to submit annual audits to the State Auditor, and the audit is expected to be available for public inspection once completed. The official protest statute and election statutes are current through the NC General Assembly site, and I am including this issue because of its effect on voters and because I obtained the 2025 audit only from the State Auditor's office after repeated requests.

Before the election, the **2024 audit** was still the one posted on the county website. The **2025 audit** had not been posted.

I requested the 2025 audit from the county manager's office several weeks before the election, multiple times, and it was not delivered.

I finally obtained it from the **State Auditor's Office**.

According to the county's commissioner-approved budget, the county budget was **\$37,084,332**. If the county maintained at least **8%** in its general fund balance, that would be **\$2,966,746**.

According to the budget information I obtained, the county had only **2.6%** in general fund balance, which is **\$939,919**.

I believe the county was in a serious deficit position, and this was the first time in 20 years.

At the same time that this audit information was not being made available to the public, Jeff Whitson used videos from the county office under the county seal and in his official role as county commissioner to tell the public that the county was not in debt, not in bad shape, and was doing well.

I believe withholding the audit while using official county communications to reassure the public about the county's finances could easily have swayed at least 69 voters.

XII. County Employees Campaigning for the Incumbents While Possibly On Duty

On several occasions, county employees, including a department head and another employee, were out campaigning for the three incumbents who hired them. I believe they may have been on duty while they were campaigning.

This could be investigated by obtaining county records showing when they were on duty and comparing those records to the dates and times of their social media posts and campaign activities.

Even if some of the posts have since been deleted, I have screenshots of certain statements and activity.

I believe county work records, time records, and related communications should be preserved and reviewed.

XIII. EMS Director Kristy Bryant and County Employee Andrew Bishop Called Me and Jason Silvers "Pedophiles"

During the campaign period, **Yancey County EMS Director Kristy Bryant** and **county employee Andrew Bishop** made public statements on social media stating that I, Randy Buckner, and Jason Silvers were pedophiles.

I have screenshots of those posts.

These were not rumors to me. I have the screenshots, so yes, they said it.

Because Kristy Bryant and Andrew Bishop are county employees, I believe the Board should investigate whether those statements were made while they were on duty, during county-compensated time, or using county resources.

These statements were highly damaging and had obvious potential to influence voters during an active election.

Given the narrow margin, I believe those statements could have affected the election outcome.

XIV. Kristy Bryant Confronted Me While On Duty, in Uniform, in the Courthouse Courtroom

In addition to her social media conduct, **Kristy Bryant**, who is the EMS Director, confronted me after a January 2026 county commissioner meeting.

She was on duty, in official uniform, inside the **county courthouse courtroom**.

She asked me:

1. Why I was running for county commissioner
2. Why I was at the meeting that night
3. Whether I was running because my daughter had run and did not win

Because Kristy Bryant is a county department head, and because this happened while she was on duty and in uniform inside the courthouse, I believe this raises serious concerns about political activity and political pressure by county officials during an active election.

XV. Building Inspection Office Rumors That I Had “Turned People In”

Another way I believe the county government, under the direction of the incumbent commissioners or their associates, swayed or kept voters from voting for me was through false statements that I had turned people in to the Yancey County Building Inspection Office.

I learned during the campaign that several people had been told that I, Randy Buckner, and in some cases Jason Silvers, had turned them in.

This is false.

I have had **no contact with John England**, Director of the Yancey County Building Inspection Office, in over two years.

My only recent contact with the other inspector, **Anthony Hensley**, was on **October 1**, when he came to inspect a small project I am doing.

Also, when someone is reported for unlicensed contracting or similar matters, that is not something you turn in to the county building inspection office. Those matters go through the **North Carolina Licensing Board for General Contractors**, using a signed form, because they have investigators. The Yancey County Building Inspection Office are inspectors, not investigators.

Because of that, it would have been virtually impossible for me to have anonymously turned people in through the building inspection office the way was being claimed.

I requested from the **Yancey County Manager’s Office** a document showing where I had filed a complaint on anyone. I made that request several weeks ago and still have not gotten a response, because there is no complaint on anyone.

I have reason to believe these allegations were manufactured and spread to harm my campaign.

XVI. Specific People Told I Had Turned Them In

I know the building inspection-related rumor was told to at least the following people:

- London Neil
- Levi Robison
- Royce Ball

Their families then spread it like wildfire.

One of the projects involved was the **Funshine Camp project** at the West Yancey Fire Department.

Another involved **Stephanie Johnson**, who is known for rebuilding homes.

The Funshine Camp project was being done by **3 Cross Construction**, **London Neil**, and involved people connected to the building inspection office, including **John England's son** and **John England's father-in-law, Royce Ball**.

I believe this rumor campaign cost me possibly hundreds of votes.

XVII. April Grindstaff, Stephanie Johnson, Donald Banks, and Others Amplified the Rumor

April Grindstaff, David Grindstaff's wife, posted on her personal Facebook page:

"Funshine Camp do better."

I believe that post was intended to insinuate that I, Randy Buckner, and possibly Jason Silvers had turned in the Funshine Camp project.

Under that, **Stephanie Johnson** commented that:

“The list is much more extensive.”

I later learned that a school board member’s sister, **Edwin Fortner’s sister**, had been at Stephanie Johnson’s place telling many people that Randy Buckner had turned them in.

Also under Stephanie Johnson’s comment, **Donald Banks** said:

“Stephanie Johnson, very expensive, very, very expensive.”

Donald Banks is married to **Gretchen Banks**, who is the Republican Board of Education candidate for November, and Gretchen Banks is **John England’s sister**. Donald Banks is therefore John England’s brother-in-law.

I believe this was a conjured-up mess and a hit designed to destroy my campaign, and I believe it ran through people associated with Yancey County local government and the Yancey County Republican Party.

XVIII. I Have Reason to Believe Jeff Whitson Helped Start the Building Inspection Rumor

I have reason to believe that **Jeff Whitson** told the building inspector this after he came and met with me on **January 6** to question me.

After that interaction, I began hearing that people were being told I had reported them, even though I had not.

Because of the timing, I have reason to believe Jeff Whitson may have helped start or spread that rumor.

I am asking the Board to investigate this.

XIX. Election Day Chief Judge Replacement at Cane River and Joyce Anglin's Social Media Activity

On Election Day, **Yancey County Republican Chair John Anglin** had **Democrat Cathy King** removed as Chief Judge at the Cane River precinct and replaced by **his mother, Joyce Anglin**.

After the election, Joyce Anglin publicly liked multiple social media posts supportive of the incumbents:

- On **March 4**, Joyce Anglin liked David Grindstaff's Facebook post thanking Yancey County
- On **March 4**, Joyce Anglin liked Kenzie Norton's Facebook post stating her daughter was happy Sandi could "keep her job"
- On **March 3**, Joyce Anglin liked Sandi Norton's personal Facebook post saying, "**Do I really hear silence?**"
- Joyce Anglin also liked Sandi Norton's post of the three incumbents under the county seal in the county commissioner office
- On **February 13**, Joyce Anglin liked a post by Stacy McIntyre Greene showing the three incumbents together
- She also liked Stacy's posts on **January 22, January 7, and January 5**

I believe this shows clear bias or, at minimum, raises serious questions about impartiality in an election official who served as Chief Judge on Election Day.

XX. County Government Videos and Articles Looked Like Official Promotion of the Incumbents

In addition to the direct campaign materials, the county government's own page and county-produced or county-assisted writeups promoted incumbent commissioners during the election season.

The January 14 and January 21 walkthrough videos on the Yancey County local government page were also turned into articles sent to the **Yancey Common Times Journal** from the commissioner office, according to Pat Randolph.

Those articles discussed the walkthroughs and videos and included quotes from incumbents Sandi Norton and Stacy McIntyre Greene.

I believe these official communications blurred the line between county business and campaign promotion and likely influenced voters who saw the county government page and newspaper coverage.

XXI. Pattern of Official-Looking Campaigning Using County Government Position and Resources

Taken together, the following all created the appearance that the county government supported the incumbents:

- the photo of the three incumbents in the commissioner office under the county seal
- the newspaper publication of that image
- the Facebook post saying "Please go vote for your true Republicans" under the county seal

- the Yancey County Local Government Facebook videos highlighting the commissioners' accomplishments during campaign season
- county employees appearing in those videos
- statements by county officials that the county was doing well financially while the 2025 audit was not being made public
- public statements by county employees against me
- courthouse questioning of me by a department head while on duty and in uniform

I believe voters could easily have understood all of this as a sign that the county government itself supported the incumbents and opposed challengers like me.

XXII. Material Impact on the Election Outcome

The difference between me and Sandi Norton was approximately **69 votes**.

I do not believe I have to show with mathematical certainty exactly which 69 voters were affected. I believe the Board should determine whether these irregularities **could have affected the outcome**. The protest statute expressly provides for election protests concerning counting/tabulation or other irregularities, with filing deadlines tied to the canvass.

I believe the following could easily have influenced at least 69 voters:

- illegal sample ballots handed out daily at the Board of Elections and around the county
- continued distribution after BOE officials were notified

- text and social-media circulation of those ballots
- vehicles and people interfering with my ability to greet voters on the last day of early voting
- use of county seal and county office in incumbent campaign images
- official county government Facebook videos highlighting incumbent accomplishments during election season
- county-provided articles to the newspaper featuring incumbent quotes
- withholding of the 2025 audit while telling the public the county was doing well
- county employees publicly calling me and Jason Silvers pedophiles
- on-duty questioning of me by EMS Director Kristy Bryant in uniform in the courthouse
- false rumors that I had reported community members to building inspections
- community and political amplification of those rumors
- concerns over the replacement of a chief judge on Election Day and the appearance of bias by the replacement

In a county the size of Yancey County, I believe these actions, individually and certainly cumulatively, could easily move 69 votes.

XXIII. Requested Remedy

Pursuant to **G.S. 163-182.9**, I respectfully request that the Yancey County Board of Elections:

1. Conduct a **formal evidentiary hearing under oath** on this protest.
2. Investigate the production and distribution of the illegal sample ballots and determine whether **G.S. 163-165.2(b)** was violated.
3. Determine whether the illegal sample ballots and other irregularities caused voter confusion or improperly influenced voters.
4. Investigate the use of the county seal, county commissioner office, county government Facebook page, county employees, county communications, and county-produced or county-assisted media during the election period.
5. Investigate whether county employees engaged in campaign activity or made campaign-related attacks while on duty or using county resources.
6. Investigate the circumstances surrounding the removal of Cathy King as Chief Judge at Cane River and the appointment of Joyce Anglin.
7. Order a **hand-to-eye recount and/or audit of all ballots cast** in the Republican Primary Election for Yancey County Commissioner.
8. Determine whether the irregularities described in this protest **could have affected the outcome** of the election.
9. If so, refer the matter to the **North Carolina State Board of Elections** for further review and appropriate action.

10. Request that the State Board consider whether a **new primary election** or other appropriate remedy is warranted.
11. Require that any recount, ballot audit, or ballot review be conducted transparently with candidate representatives and neutral observers present.
12. Immediately preserve all election-related records and materials, including but not limited to:
 - all ballots
 - absentee ballots and envelopes
 - provisional ballots
 - poll books and voter check-in records
 - early voting records
 - chain-of-custody records
 - tabulator tapes and reports
 - tabulator memory devices
 - audit logs and system logs
 - surveillance footage from the Board of Elections facility and voting sites
 - communications or complaints related to the sample ballots
 - communications relating to Election Day staffing decisions

- any county records or employee time records relevant to campaign activity during work hours
13. Refer potential violations of law to the appropriate authorities for investigation and enforcement.
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XXIV. Evidence

I will present and/or submit evidence including:

- copies of the illegal sample ballot
- screenshots of texts containing the ballot
- screenshots of Joan Schultz distribution activity
- screenshots of Sandi Norton and Kenzie Norton posts
- screenshots of Joyce Anglin likes
- copies of newspaper ads and articles
- screenshots of county government videos and dates posted
- screenshots of Kristy Bryant and Andrew Bishop calling me and Jason Silvers pedophiles
- photograph of Nancy Grindstaff Ogle stepping across the buffer line
- photographs and/or evidence of vehicles blocking voter access to me

- screenshots and social media posts relating to the building inspection rumors
 - any additional evidence that becomes available
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XXV. Certification

I certify that the statements in this protest are true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief.

Signature: Randy Buckner

Name: Randy Buckner

Date: 3/5/26

A practical filing note: because this is long, I would put the protest itself in one document and then label the evidence as **Exhibit A, Exhibit B, Exhibit C**, and so on.