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## Anson County Early Voting Discussions Were Included in Records of Auditor’s Office Involvement

**Auditor’s liaison discussed Anson voting hours as records reveal broader involvement in county early voting plans**

A staff member in the North Carolina auditor’s office used mentions of the wishes of his boss and the state Republican Party in an attempt to sway decisions on at least two counties’ early voting plans. Hundreds of pages produced as a result of public records requests reveal the extent to which Dallas Woodhouse, a former elections liaison for state Auditor Dave Boliek, pushed for early voting sites in particular locations and against them in others.

Woodhouse recommended that counties eliminate Sunday voting hours, advised county chairs on bargaining tactics to reach unanimous approval for early voting plans that Democrats didn’t like, and told two county elections chairs what Republicans on the state Board of Elections would or wouldn’t approve and what the state Republican Party wanted. Woodhouse also provided county chairs with a sample letter to the editor intended to counter a news story he didn’t like, communicated with the New Hanover county elections board chair about its former director, who was fired this year, and asked the state Republican Party general counsel to help find an early voting site in Cabarrus County.

“Why not?” Woodhouse said when asked about his request to the state GOP lawyer for help. “We ask all kinds of people, ‘Do you know of a place?’” Woodhouse said in an interview.

Woodhouse is a political operative and former North Carolina Republican Party executive director whom Boliek hired last year to work with counties as his elections liaison, a newly created position under Boliek’s oversight of the board. Woodhouse and others on Boliek’s staff, including Kelly Mann, monitored early voting site selection. The documents show Boliek also expressed preferences for particular locations. When Woodhouse wanted counties to delay votes on early voting plans, he used Boliek’s name. Boliek’s office did not respond to an emailed question about its involvement in early voting plans.

Woodhouse said in an interview that there was never an interest in using early voting plans to tip the scales in Republicans’ favor. The auditor’s office did have a goal of establishing early voting sites in counties’ more rural stretches, he said. Rather than limiting early voting, this year’s plans will result in expanded hours, Woodhouse said.

Woodhouse was reassigned from his elections liaison job after media reports about his involvement in early voting plans. County elections officials were told Mann would be their new point person in Boliek’s office. Woodhouse resigned from the auditor’s office last month, about a week after his reassignment.

A controversial 2024 law stripped Democratic Governor-elect Josh Stein of his power to appoint the state Board of Elections and gave that power to Boliek, a Republican. The state and county elections boards flipped from Democratic to Republican majorities. Boliek appointed all county chairs. The documents were obtained by American Oversight, a progressive nonprofit organization that specializes in obtaining public records. American Oversight made several attempts to obtain records from the auditor’s office.

**Mentions of GOP Interests, Anson County Communications** Several email and text exchanges reveal an interest in establishing early voting sites in Republican areas or maintaining early voting hours for GOP voters.

In Anson County, Woodhouse cautioned against deep cuts in early voting hours. Anson had adopted a plan that cut early voting to the bare minimum, he said in an interview. In a text exchange with Anson elections board Chair Kelly Cox Newton on June 10, Woodhouse said he would work on an early voting plan that would win state approval. The text chain is a back-and-forth about Anson adding more early voting hours, with Woodhouse offering advice on how to convince Democrats on the Anson elections board to go along with a plan.

One of the messages stated, “fact is Gop voters need hours beyond 8-5 and some Saturdays is good.” Woodhouse said in the interview that he was trying to cajole a Republican chair into considering a more robust early voting plan. “I’m talking their language,” Woodhouse said. He wanted to emphasize that “Republicans vote, too.”

In a May 14 email, David Boone, Durham’s elections board chair, gave Woodhouse a rundown on Durham’s plan, noting that two sites had been added but that officials had been unable to find a location in the Brier Creek area “in which there is a considerable republican presence.” Boone wrote, “Note the yellow area on the Republican Density map.”

Boone said in an email to NC Newsline that county elections staff provided the density map, and finding early voting sites near Republican voters is required by state law. “It is required in accordance with NCGS 163-166.35(a) that the State Board consider any disproportionate favoritism based on party, race, ethnic group, or candidacy,” Boone wrote. “As such, staff considers those factors when proposing plans to the Board.” Boone also sent an email to Courtney Geels, a Republican who ran for Congress in 2022 from the 4th District, statistics on turnout and ages of voters at N.C. Central and Duke University polling sites for the 2022 general election.

In Wake County, Woodhouse mentioned in a May 19 exchange with Mann that state Board of Elections member Angela Hawkins, the former county chair, was continuing to work on early voting plans for Wake County. A message from the exchange referenced “willow springs,” a “new northern (shietzel) voting location” and “state to methoid road,” followed by, “angela is still on this.” Another message stated, “Angela is still heavily involved in this.”

Hawkins was appointed to the state Board of Elections in March. The state board votes to approve early voting plans that win unanimous approval. The Wake County elections board approved its plan unanimously. The state board sets early voting plans only for counties where votes are not unanimous. “I was not heavily involved with Wake Counties unanimous early voting plan,” Hawkins wrote in an email. Rep. Michael Schietzelt, R-Wake, represents a district in northern Wake County. He said in an email he did not ask for a new early voting location. Woodhouse said Schietzelt was mentioned because he is from the area.

**Directions on Early Voting Locations** The auditor’s office pushed Cabarrus County to open a fifth early voting site. In texts with Cabarrus elections Chair Jay White, Woodhouse asked him to delay a vote on a fall early voting plan while they pursued a site in or around Midland, which is more Republican than the county as a whole. In one message, Woodhouse wrote, “Jay: Auditor Boliek is requesting the Board delay approving the fall early voting plan until he can speak with you and research a couple of things. otherwise we can try and arrange a call later today.”

White told Woodhouse it would be up for discussion. Another message concerning the proposed additional site stated, “Ok. But please do not pass a plan yet until we see if the 5th site can work,” followed by, “This is the top priority county we see.”

At its April 27 meeting, White made a motion to table the early voting plan vote for 30 days to allow for time to look for a site in Midland, the board’s minutes show. Four members voted in favor. One was opposed. Woodhouse also texted Fraley, the state Republican Party lawyer, about the attempt to delay a vote in Cabarrus over an additional site.

“We urge in the strongest possible terms” that they delay a vote on early voting plans, Woodhouse told Fraley in an April 23 text. “I am on it!” Fraley replied. The Cabarrus Board stuck with four sites. None are in Midland.

In Jackson County, the auditor’s office was trying to convince two Republicans on the board to reject an early voting site on the Western Carolina University campus. Republicans said at a board meeting where the campus site was approved in a 3-1 vote that they received “pressure from Raleigh” not to approve the campus site.

NC Local previously reported that Woodhouse told Jackson County elections chairman Bill Thompson the morning before the board voted in June, “Don’t let them have a vote.” The recently released texts reveal that Woodhouse’s attempts to delay a vote started weeks before. Woodhouse looked to arrange conference calls with Boliek, Thompson, himself, another member of the auditor’s staff and the two Republican members of the Jackson board who wanted the campus early voting site.

It’s unclear whether Boliek participated in those calls. In one message, Woodhouse wrote, “Auditor does not need to call Jackson County tomorrow. Chair is pushing the vote off another few weeks/month. I have talked to the county party chair and he is working it and The State party is as well, but I have not heard an update from them. But we bought some time. I will be back in touch on next steps.”

Thompson was the only member to vote against including the campus site. In another message, Woodhouse advised, “Bill: delay the vote for a while. But as a last resort you vote against the plan. Submit the alternative plan of the primary plan and we fight for it at NCSBE.”

In a separate text, Woodhouse had urged Thompson to “stand strong” if there was a vote. An alternative plan that Thompson voted for without the campus site would win approval from the state board, Woodhouse wrote. The state board would adopt an alternative, a recreation center that had been used in previous elections, Woodhouse said.

Woodhouse said in a Thursday interview that critics just don’t like Republicans being involved in elections administration. “They scandalize normal activity even when it serves the same interest they have,” he said.

A lawyer with Boliek’s office told American Oversight the office could not recover all relevant records because Woodhouse deleted some information from his phone even though he was told not to. That information could not be retrieved. American Oversight denounced the destruction of public records.

“According to the State Auditor’s own general counsel, Dallas Woodhouse deleted public records after being explicitly instructed to preserve them, in direct violation of OSA policy. That is an extraordinary breach of the public trust, and Woodhouse should be held accountable, as should OSA for failing to secure these records sooner,” Chioma Chukwu, American Oversight executive director, said in a statement.

“The records that survived show why their destruction matters,” Chukwu said. “They reveal OSA officials, including Woodhouse, working behind the scenes to influence decisions about early voting, Sunday voting, and polling locations, while communicating with Republican Party officials about some of those decisions. The records also raise serious questions about the extent of Auditor Boliek’s involvement in these efforts.”

“These are decisions that directly affect how North Carolinians exercise their right to vote. The public deserves to know the full extent of OSA involvement, what records were destroyed, and whether state officials entrusted with overseeing our elections were using their offices to advance partisan interests,” Chukwu said.

Asked in the interview why he deleted information from his phone, Woodhouse said, “That assumes something I don’t think is true. I believe I turned over everything.”

By Lynn Bonner, NC Newsline, [ncnewsline.com](https://www.ncnewsline.com)

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