

**EDITORIALS**    JANUARY 12, 2016 9:00 AM

# Prosecutor's text looks bad either way it's viewed

## HIGHLIGHTS

Seven-word message potentially can be interpreted different ways

Pierce County's Mark Lindquist says it was political directive, not public business

Either way you parse it, the prosecutor made mistakes



## FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

As seven-word exhortations go, Mark Lindquist's text message won't be remembered by history in the same light as Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death" or John F. Kennedy's "We choose to go to the moon." In a few years, it might not be remembered at all.

This much is clear: The late-night command the Pierce County prosecutor sent to an employee in 2011 has racked up costs way out of proportion to the number of words in the message. Taxpayers are on the hook for more than \$315,000 spent on private attorneys the county retained to keep Lindquist's texts under wraps.

Anyone not following the story closely might yawn and shrug after reading the seven words, recently disclosed to the county by former Deputy Prosecutor Mary Robnett.

"Tell allies to comment on TNT story," the text reads.

So what's the big deal?

Robnett contends it was a big deal, while Lindquist purports to believe it wasn't. He claims the text shows he was requesting a political errand, not carrying out public business. He claims asking Robnett to urge his political friends to post Web comments on a News Tribune story had no connection to the work of his office.

What makes it a big deal is that Lindquist broke the rules either way. If it was public business, then he has some explaining to do about why he's repeatedly refused to give up the text since another county employee filed a record request in 2011. The courts and the public will rightly wonder what other public acts he's conducting on his personal phone.

If it was political business, then he has some explaining to do about why he told a subordinate to help promote his next campaign. Washington law doesn't allow these two sides of public life to mix. It's why officials must maintain separate campaign staffs, offices and phone numbers when they run for reelection. It's why they can't put campaign bumper stickers on government vehicles.

By playing the political card, Lindquist might have pleaded to a lesser offense. But the people of Pierce County have a right to be offended either way.



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