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T COLUMBIA DAILY TRIBUNE

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WATER MAIN WOES

Shops survey soggy scene

Flood does not dampen spirits.

BY ALAN BURDZIAK

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Michelle and Aaro Froese spent much of the day Friday at Gotcha!, the costume rental shop the couple owns at 819 E. Walnut St., coordinating with employees and a contractor to fix damage done when water flooded the store Thursday evening after a water main broke.

By about 3 p.m. Friday, crews had cleared standing water from the ground floor and basement. Three employees still were sorting costumes in the basement, divvying up ones that were not damaged and those that needed to be tossed or washed.

Aaro Froese said the shop, which opened in August 1996, has about 5,000 costumes. He said 500 to 750 already had been sent for cleaning, with more likely to follow. Dozens of costumes had to be thrown out, but the Froeses were not crestfallen.

"I'm trying to be positive about it," Aaro Froese said. "No one got hurt. It's all stuff that can be cleaned."

He and his wife started cleaning the store at 9 a.m. Friday. Employees had come in to assist, and people stopped by throughout the day to lend a hand or some encouraging words.

The couple was still doing business Friday, Michelle Froese said, renting five "Star Wars" costumes to one woman.

The main at Ninth and Walnut streets that broke and flooded Gotcha! with ankle-deep water was one of five that burst Thursday in the city.

It was among four that broke at about 6 p.m. and two that ruptured downtown, the other being outside Uprise Bakery and



Daniel Brenner/Tribune

Assistant manager Karissa Brickey, from left, costume specialist Regan Houston, center, and manager Chloe Pivaler sort through damaged costumes at Gotcha! to see if they are salvageable Friday in the basement of the store. They wore protective masks while looking through merchandise after a water main broke and flooded the store.

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Ragtag Cinema, 15 Hitt St. The city had repaired all the mains by Friday morning.

The other two breaks at 6 p.m. were at 911 S. West Blvd. and 812 W. Worley St. A fifth broke at 1000 I-70 Drive S.W. in the evening and affected six customers. About 45 homes and customers were affected by the earlier breaks.

Crews chalked them up to a combination of dry weather causing the ground to shift and

an increase in pressure when the water tower on Walnut west of downtown was being refilled, causing a surge in pressure and breaking the old pipes.

East of the costume shop, Salon Nefisa had a sign on its door that it was closed because of the flooding.

To the west, contractors were cleaning up inside Bleu restaurant. Asked whether they would file a claim to request the city pay for some of the damage, Aaro Froese said he would speak with his insurance company first, but he might ask the city to pay his deductible.

"I don't think the city is too worried about my rubber dog poop shop," he said jokingly.

Aaro Froese checked on the shop Thursday night, his wife said, and found water pouring in the front door from the broken main. He opened the door to let some of the water out, but the couple said they didn't think it could get much worse.

"We knew the water, once they turned off the main, would start to dissipate," Michelle Froese said.

The outpouring of support and help from people both in Columbia and across the country had surprised and humbled the Froeses.

"I could use a hundred bucks right now, but I feel like the richest guy in Columbia," Aaro Froese said.

Panel rejects misuse gripe versus Hawley

Group dismisses ethics violation.

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE? See a copy of the ruling online at www.columbiatribune.com.

BY RUDI KELLER

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The Missouri Ethics Commission on Friday dismissed a complaint against Republican attorney general candidate Josh Hawley, deciding it found no evidence he improperly used not-for-profits he created to promote his candidacy without disclosing donors or spending.

The commission left unanswered, however, whether Hawley, an associate professor of law at the University of Missouri, misused public resources to promote his campaign. State law bars the commission from investigating complaints other than campaign finance violations or failure to properly report personal financial information filed within 60 days of the primary until after the general election.

The complaint, filed by Stoddard County Prosecuting Attorney Russell Oliver, was received on June 3, the day after the deadline for fully investigating its charges, said Stacy Heislen, deputy director of the commission.

The commission took the complaint because of the campaign finance allegations, a letter to Hawley from commission Executive Director James Klahr stated. Because of the time limits in state law, the commission "did not entertain the allegations related to the use of university resources for political purposes," he wrote.

Oliver alleged Hawley used the Missouri Liberty Project and two not-for-profit corporations to engage in partisan campaigning before announcing his bid for office last July. Hawley created the Missouri Liberty Project to highlight his work on religious liberty issues.

A second complaint, naming Hawley campaign treasurer Tom Walsh, also was dismissed. Klahr sent letters to Hawley and Walsh reporting the dismissal.

"The commission did not identify any evidence to establish reasonable grounds that the not-for-profits were used to promote your candidacy, nor did they make contributions or expenditures on your behalf," the letter to Hawley reads. "Evidence was not found that you met the definition of a candidate prior to officially declaring as a candidate and registering a committee."

Oliver also claimed a Twitter account and the followers it had attracted were transferred from the Missouri Liberty Project to Hawley's campaign and should have been reported as an in-kind contribution.

"Evidence was not found to support the Twitter account belonged to the not-for-profits thus requiring the reporting of an in-kind contribution by the committee," Klahr wrote.

The commission considered the investigative report on the complaint in closed session. Before the ruling was issued publicly, Oliver said he spoke to investigators several times and was satisfied that they were seriously considering his allegations.

After the ruling was issued, however, Oliver said he was disappointed.

"We truly have the Wild West in Missouri," Oliver said. "There is absolutely no reason now for someone to comply with the laws."

Hawley is in the middle of a bitter fight with state Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, for the Republican nomination for attorney general in the Aug. 2 primary. The campaign has featured scathing attack ads from Schaefer accusing Hawley of taking sides with a terrorist in a court case over religious rights of prisoners and ads from Hawley saying Schaefer is a moderate masquerading as a conservative.

Schaefer's ad has been condemned by former Sen. Jack Danforth, a Republican who served as attorney general from 1969 to 1977, and its accuracy has been called into question by statements from the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which issued a statement that Hawley's name was included in a brief for the case by mistake.

Reacting to the commission action, Hawley spokesman Scott Paradise said it has "been a bad week for Kurt Schaefer. First, his TV smear ad was proven to be totally and willfully false. Now the ethics commission has dismissed his supporters' frivolous ethics complaint."

Schaefer campaign manager Scott Dieckhaus said the statement about the allegations that were not investigated means the action decided little other than that there was not enough evidence to prove Hawley violated campaign finance law.

"The last paragraph indicates there may be other investigations or other avenues for looking at abuses of power," Dieckhaus said. "They left everything else on the table."

The winner of the primary will face either Teresa Hensley, former Cass County prosecuting attorney, or Jake Zimmerman, St. Louis County assessor, in the November election.

Oliver's complaint asked the commission to re-investigate a complaint from 2015. Using evidence from an open records lawsuit against Hawley and the University of Missouri, Oliver accused Hawley of using his university computers to set up speaking engagements with partisan groups.

Oliver said he would review the decision and consider whether other agencies should be asked to investigate potential violations of federal tax or election laws.



Hawley

Commission cleared of violation

Complaint alleged favor of candidate.

BY CAITLIN CAMPBELL

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The three members of the Boone County Commission did not violate state law when the county posted public notice of a campaign event for the upcoming commission election, the Missouri Ethics Commission has ruled.

The ethics group Friday dismissed a formal complaint against Southern District Commissioner Karen Miller, Northern District Commissioner Janet Thompson and Presiding Commissioner Dan Atwill alleging they violated state law when they posted public notice of Southern District candidate Ted Farnen's campaign kickoff event on March 22 and a "Democratic End of Filing Event" on March 29.

The complaint argued the notices broke a section of the law that states no contribution or expenditure of public funds shall be made toward supporting or opposing any candidate for public office.

"While there was a ... calendar entry noting a campaign event for a candidate for the Boone County Commission, there is nothing

in the calendar entry that appears to advocate for that candidate," Executive Director James Klahr wrote in the ethics commission's ruling to dismiss the complaint.

Every time two commissioners gather at one location could be considered a quorum of the group, Miller said, so the county often posts notices for every county commissioner run-in — even if public business will not be discussed. Posting notice of both events was done in the interest of transparency, she said.

"We get in trouble when we don't post, we get in trouble when we do post," Miller said. "You can't go wrong with doing it more than the law requires."

Taylor Burks, a local Republican who led a failed attempt to recall Fifth Ward Councilwoman Laura Nauser this year, filed the complaint on April 1.

Burks previously worked on Republican Northern District commission candidate Paul Prevo's campaign, but the two parted ways in



Atwill



Thompson



Miller

February because of time conflicts and political differences, Prevo has said.

Prevo, who suspended his campaign in late May, said Friday that he was not involved in the ethics complaint against the commission.

Burks said Friday that he appreciated the commission's deliberation on the matter. He said he still finds it noteworthy that the Boone County commissioners "selectively placed their preferred candidate's campaign event on their public website."

"The county commissioners also excused their own behavior as complying with Missouri's Sunshine Law, even though they've consistently shown a disregard for public transparency and accountability while mishandling the veterans' memorial and Boone County Fairgrounds deliberations," Burks said.

Klahr said the ethics commission found no reasonable grounds to support a violation of the law, but encouraged the county commission to consider other ways to make calendar items public in compliance with the Sunshine Law without suggesting support of a candidate or ballot measure.

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HIGH 93 LOW 74

Tomorrow

HIGH 90 LOW 71

More weather on Page 9A

DEATHS

Anna Allen

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6 31045 24001 6

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