



Group Says Interim Pres. Selection Broke Law

Process to Pick Parish President Violated Open Meetings Rules

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HARAHAN, La. -- A watchdog group says the Jefferson Parish Council may have broken the law by choosing Steve Theriot as interim parish president without telling the public about how it made the selection.

Council members announced Monday that Theriot, the former state legislative auditor, would replace Aaron Broussard, who stepped down Friday.

Broussard resigned amid a federal investigation into parish contracts.

Council members said after a series of individual phone calls between several members, they agreed Theriot would be the best choice.

But the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana said the council violated the Open Meetings Law.

"Definitely a lot of feedback on this is done behind closed doors," said Ann Heath of PAR.

Heath said the public should be aware of all decisions made by the council.

"At this point, although laws have been violated, the council would be wise to step back and probably give public notice and discuss business in the open," Heath said.

Councilman Chris Roberts said there was no secret meeting or private phone conferences. He said most members agreed in various phone calls that Theriot was best, and they wanted to move forward.

But Council President John Young said he was left out of the process. He said he thinks that's because he didn't agree with the way Theriot was chosen.

"The public needs input. They were shut out and that's unfortunate," he said. Young said he wants to open the interim position for public input and give others the option to apply for the job.

"We're moving forward. My problem is with the process, or lack of process in this situation," young said.

In addition, Citizens for Good Government chairwoman Margaret Baird wrote an e-mail to council members that reads, in part: "Why did these Councilmen select the new interim President by meeting behind closed doors and with a backroom deal? The haste and secret process... is indicative of what is wrong with Jefferson Parish."