

STATEMENT OF WOOD COUNTY GOP CHAIR ROB CORNELIUS

The West Virginia Republican Party has denied my appeal of its illegal removal of members and officers and improper appointments of unvetted new members and officers of the Wood County Republican Committee last month by State Chairwoman Melody Potter.

This decision is not surprising, but it is expected given Democrat-elected Governor Jim Justice's direct manipulation of the state Republican Party's operation.

Regretfully, we have been forced to notify Secretary of State Mac Warner's office of our intent to sue that office in its capacity as West Virginia's chief elections officer. We will attempt to compel them via writs to uphold West Virginia Code 3-1-9 and Chapter 3 generally by denying this arbitrary attempt by the West Virginia Republican Party to take control of the Wood County Republican Party and choose new members in violation of both West Virginia state law and the civil rights of Republican voters countywide.

A party's by-laws do not supersede West Virginia Code or Federal laws or this great Constitution anywhere, other than in Melody Potter's alternate reality.

The voters of Wood County elected a fine Republican Executive Committee, who in 2018 deemed it provident to elect me unanimously for a second term as its Chair.

The authority to govern the activities of the Wood County Republican Party rests with Wood County. This authority is not – and will never be – at Melody Potter's home in South Charleston or Jim Justice's home in Lewisburg. Anything else desecrates democracy and the elections we defend here in Wood County.

The recent acts in the name of the West Virginia Republican Party are those of a single out-of-control Chairwoman. Now, the State GOP is actively interfering and assisting in removal of duly elected members in the Kanawha County GOP. Harrison County is next. Every other county manned by those who love our First Amendment should be gravely concerned.

Melody Potter has doubled-down on her failure to lead the West Virginia Republican Party by breaking state law, selectively enforcing Party by-laws, and choosing to destroy the trust and capital built by this Party for decades. Make no mistake: This is not about what's best for the Republican Party or our conservative candidates across 55 counties. It's solely about what's best for her benefactor Jim Justice.

I have been asked by existing legal members of the Wood County Republican Committee about upcoming scheduled meetings in July and September. As was the case in the last illegal effort to take over the Wood County GOP in 2015, my intent is to suspend legal meetings, spending and activities until this matter is settled or appropriately stayed. Any action by this Committee, or anyone portraying himself as Chairman on behalf of this Committee, could likely violate the civil rights of any excluded members or members whose appointment is now in question in this case with the Secretary of State.

Quite simply, we cannot do business under shadow of litigation or the denial of the voting rights of duly elected or properly appointed members. You cannot have a body function if the membership and qualifications of that membership are universally in legal doubt.

As it stands, if Melody Potter is permitted to continue to use a single section of the West Virginia Republican Party's by-laws as her crutch to support her decisions and completely disregard state law, **ANY** member of **ANY** Committee in **ANY** county can be removed and replaced at her (or Jim Justice's) discretion. Allowing this practice to continue provides her with limitless power to choose replacements for unexpired terms in any Legislative office and any vacancy on any Committee.

Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Limitless power with no right of appeal must only be entrusted to just, wise and honest people. Melody Potter ceased to be any of those things long ago."