

Bainbridge: Jane Timken Committed a ‘Serious Breach of Ethics’ Handling Ohio GOP’s Failed Audit

March 29, 2022 Neil W. McCabe



A member of the Ohio Republican Party Central Committee’s Financial Review panel told *The Ohio Star* and *The Star News Network* the former chairwoman of the state party and now a candidate for Senate, Jane E. Timken, violated professional ethics when she concealed that her family’s accounting firm was chosen to audit the Ohio GOP books.

“[Jane Timken](#) had a fiduciary responsibility to disclose her conflict of interest related to her personal relationship with [the CLA accounting firm](#),” said [Mark A. Bainbridge](#), who was removed from the Financial Review Committee by Timken’s successor [Robert A. Paduchik](#) after the certified public accountant asked about up to hundreds of thousands of dollars in unaccountable funds.

“This is a serious breach of ethics,” the CPA said.

Timken took over the Ohio GOP Jan. 7, 2017, and she was considered a loyalist of [President Donald J. Trump](#), who won the state two months prior despite opposition from the Republican Gov. [John R. Kasich Jr.](#) and his ally, state GOP party chairman [Matt Borges](#). Timken resigned her party post in February to focus on her campaign for Senate.

When she took over the Party, she commissioned a consulting firm to prepare a report related to the Party’s finances, but did not commission a financial audit, nor did she make the consultant’s report public.

In the intervening five years, reformist members of the Central Committee, who tend to come from the pro-Trump, conservative side of the house, have insisted unsuccessfully on an audit. They have been thwarted by Central Committee members who tend to associate with the party apparatus, more than two dozen of whom have party positions and or political appointments with the state.

Bainbridge, who retired as a partner at Ernst & Young after three decades there before going into private practice, said the issue is that CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA) was approved by the Audit Committee without Timken telling the committee members that the firm handled her family’s taxes and finances.

“CLA does not have much of a presence in Ohio, with only small outposts in Akron, Toledo, and Canton,” said Bainbridge in his Oct. 13, 2021, letter to all members of the Ohio Republican Party Central Committee after CLA resigned from the ORP account.

“In fact, they do not have offices in Ohio’s three largest cities, Cleveland, Columbus, or Cincinnati. CLA’s Canton office is small and mostly provides tax services,” he wrote. “At the January meeting, Timken did

not disclose CLA prepares tax returns and performs other accounting services for Timken and Timken family businesses including her husband's political lobbying firm [McKinley Strategies](#)."

The former chairwoman's husband owns McKinley Strategies, Ward J. "Tim" Timken Jr., and the firm's vice president in charge of its lobbying business is Jason Paduchik, the brother of the current state GOP chairman who succeeded Timken.

In the letter, Bainbridge went into greater detail about Timken's conflict of interest and the complicit role of the Audit Committee Chairman Curt Braden and party Executive Director Robert Secaur.

"Timken, who attended all meetings, obviously knew that she had a clear conflict of interest with CLA. Braden, like Timken, is also from Canton and apparently also has a relationship with CLA's Canton office," he wrote. "It appears the two Canton residents, Timken and Braden, might have told Secaur to put the fix in for CLA."

Bainbridge said that the Audit Committee sent requests for proposals out to a handful of accounting firms, but CLA was not on that list; instead, it was added by the party staff after the committee selected the firms to whom it would send the RFPs.

Secaur told *The Ohio Star* and *The Star News Network* he did not have a role in choosing CLA; instead, it was Braden.

The former E&Y partner said Timken's committed two ethical lapses.

"First, they didn't disclose that CLA was added," he said. "Nobody on the Audit Committee realized that, but Curt probably knew it – that was a violation."

The second lapse was the conflict of interest, he said.

"Jane was sitting in the meeting, and she should have said: 'We added this firm that's in Canton, Ohio, that does my personal tax returns and my family's personal business,' and she did not do that – that's a violation of ethics and her fiduciary responsibility."

In September, CLA resigned from the audit and the ORP account, and the party has not had an audit since.

At the December Central Committee, Paduchik said from the podium as he presided over the meeting that CLA resigned from the account because of Bainbridge's meddling and harassment.

Bainbridge told *The Ohio Star* and *The Star News Network* that such a charge is absurd given his professional bearing and stature and that he was trying to help the firm be successful.

He said that CLA had no choice to resign because of the very conflict of interest that landed them the account.

"They would have to talk about the material misstatements that happened under Jane's watch," he said.

"If they did that, they would have then risked losing the business from the Timken family."

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