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## Politicians guilty

Former Covington city commission candidate Craig Johnson (left) stands in Kenton District Court with his attorney, Shannon D. Sexton, waiting to plead guilty to a misdemeanor charge of conspiracy to violate campaign finance restrictions.

**The Enquirer/Patrick Reddy**



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# Commissioner pleads guilty

By Mike Rutledge • [mrutledge@nky.com](mailto:mrutledge@nky.com) • April 29, 2009

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**COVINGTON** - Covington Commissioner Steven Megerle, former longtime city commissioner Jerry Bamberger and one-time commission candidate Craig Johnson pleaded guilty in Kenton District Court Wednesday on charges of violating campaign laws.

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Johnson and Bamberger each pleaded guilty to conspiring to violate campaign finance restrictions. Megerle entered an Alford plea to that charge. Bamberger and Megerle also pleaded guilty to conspiring to fail to identify campaign contributors and advertisers. The charges are Class A misdemeanors.

### • Photos: Politicians guilty

The three were given jail sentences but they are suspended under several conditions. Bamberger received a jail sentence of 12 months, which was suspended for two years on the condition that he commits no other crimes, does not seek public office and handles no campaign finances during that period.

As part of Megerle's 12-month jail sentence that was suspended for a year, he cannot raise, collect or handle money of any political campaign during the one-year suspension period. That appears to prevent him from filing to run in next year's city elections, although it was not immediately clear if he could not run in some other way, such as a write-in campaign.

Johnson was sentenced to six months in jail which was suspended for two years on the condition he commits no crimes, does not seek political office or handle campaign funds during that two-year period.

The charges stem from pamphlets distributed prior to November's commission election aimed at commission candidate Shawn Masters. The pamphlets, which critics say had anti-homosexual overtones, made clear the openly gay Masters' sexual preference; included information that could have made Masters prone to identity theft; and indicated he filed for bankruptcy earlier this decade.

Kenton County District Judge Ken Easterling scolded the three during Wednesday's arraignment.

"I think what you did is abhorrent to this political process," Easterling told the three after they had entered their guilty pleas.

Easterling said he believes the pamphlets were an attempt to "stoke the fires of bigotry" because they targeted Masters' sexual orientation.

He said the actions were "offensive to this court" and told the three "but for the agreement with the Commonwealth, you would be serving jail time."



Zoom

Former Covington city commissioner Jerry Bamberger (foreground) steps away from the podium in Kenton District Court after pleading guilty to two misdemeanor charges related campaign laws. He pleaded guilty to conspiracy to violate campaign finance restrictions and conspiracy to fail to identify campaign contributions and advertisers. In the background is his attorney, Phil Taliaferro.

(The Enquirer/Patrick Reddy)



Zoom

Covington city commissioner Steven J. Megerle (right) leaves Kenton District Court after pleading guilty to a misdemeanor charge related to campaign laws. At left is his attorney and father Stephen C. Megerle. He pleaded guilty to conspiracy to fail to identify campaign contributions and advertisers. He entered an Alford (the KY equivalent of no contest) plea to a charge of conspiracy to violate campaign finance restrictions.

(The Enquirer/Patrick Reddy)

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Bamberger in a statement did not apologize to Masters, but did apologize to his co-defendants for drawing them into the crime. He said he did not feel Masters was qualified to fill the seat on the commission he had occupied for 17 years.

Easterling said he did not believe he had the authority under state law to remove Megerle from the city commission, but noted there are other methods that can be taken to do that.

- [Read Bamberger's statement](#)
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