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## Justice Allen Loughry: Citizens deserve whole high court story (Daily Mail)

By Allen H. Loughry II Dec 7, 2017



West Virginia Chief Justice Allen Loughry II

In 2008, five years before I became a justice, the five sitting justices began renovating three separate floors of the court that were in need of repair. In fact, nearly 80 percent of the court's renovations were completed before I was sworn in as a justice in 2013, and 100 percent well before I became chief justice in 2017.

These important projects were not waste. The waste comes in when Canterbury spent ridiculous and inexcusable amounts of money without approval or legal authority on some of the furnishings.

Why didn't I know? Didn't I ask? After all, isn't Canterbury an employee of the court accountable to us justices?

These are simple questions. I worked for years trying to get information from Canterbury, but I was in the minority, and making him answer my questions was a near impossibility.

Furthermore, he often ridiculously proclaimed that, as administrative director, he was a constitutional officer with separate sovereign authority. This is clearly not accurate.

What about that couch? I specifically asked Canterbury the cost and was told \$1,700. He said the Supreme Court had "government contracts" and received 70 percent off of all our furniture purchases, declaring they were "dirt cheap."

But, don't justices individually review and approve all invoices? The administrative office handles the finances of the entire judicial branch which includes 74 circuit courts, 47 family courts and 158 magistrates throughout the state.

Our finance division handles between 35,000 and 40,000 invoices and purchasing card transactions per year. Reviewing and approving these transactions is one of the reasons we hire an administrative director.

I understand that as chief justice, I must answer for the court's decisions, even if I wasn't around when they occurred or if they occurred under someone else's leadership. While I have attempted to do this, many of those answers have been lost in the understandable outcry over excessive expenditures.

 **Daily Mail editorial: State Supreme Court must be accountable**

people are held responsible.

Allen H. Loughry II is chief justice of the West Virginia Supreme Court.

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Many have heard or read about the renovations at the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals. News media have boiled this down to a "he said/he said" situation, but that ignores the clear and critical facts.

My very first act upon becoming Chief Justice in 2017 was to fire the court administrator, Steve Canterbury, for a decade of misfeasance and mismanagement. The Supreme Court consists of five justices, and it takes three votes to take such an action. Until that time, Canterbury had a stronghold on the court's financial and administrative decisions.

I became so troubled by some of the actions of Canterbury and the failure of a majority of the court to even attempt to hold him accountable that I personally contacted the United States Attorney's Office. That was not an easy decision to make, and I am clearly receiving some payback for taking these actions.

#### **Hoppy Kercheval: State Supreme Court spends big on its own office furniture (Daily Mail)**

Even with a strong three-vote majority, Canterbury was not left with unfettered authority. He had strict spending limitations of \$20,000. That rule has been in place since 2009, when it was introduced by, and later signed by, Canterbury. Any expenditure above the limit has to be presented to the full Supreme Court for a vote by the majority.

That brings us to the \$32,000 couch in my office. This item, along with other expenditures above the administrative director's \$20,000 limit, was never brought before the court for approval. This is a clear violation of court rules and, in my opinion, is a misappropriation of state money.

If you don't have the legal authority to spend it, you can't spend it. I am also deeply troubled by the amounts for some of these everyday items.

#### **Gazette editorial: Supreme Court should offer people an inventory**

Another important fact lost in this web of deceit is that the Supreme Court did not waste \$3.7 million on renovations. There were serious electrical, heating, cooling, plumbing and structural issues that had not been addressed in 80 years.

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 **Daily Mail editorial: State Supreme Court must be accountable**

When Canterbury was terminated last January, he stood before all five justices and told the three of us who voted to fire him, "I will destroy you!"

These are not the kind of employment details that should play out in public; however, Canterbury's all-out war of lies on individual justices and on this court has spiraled out of control. I will no longer sit silent while he destroys the reputation of this fine institution.

Upon my becoming the chief justice in 2017, the majority of the court has worked together to begin building a much needed structure.

We fired Canterbury and hired a new administrative director who is open and transparent. We reduced our spending by approximately \$7 million.

We eliminated nonessential positions and with the help of the National Center of State Courts, we began a massive reorganization.

We completely reorganized our probation division, saving millions of dollars and setting up a system where sexual offenders will be more closely watched.

We have made changes to our drug courts that will save significant amounts of money.

We have started putting procedures in place in our finance division that will change the transparency of the court forever. Even the simplest of actions with an invoice is now at least a two-person process.

We have even made a change in the term of our chief justice. Instead of a one-year rotation, the chief justice is now selected for a four-year term with the ability to serve for subsequent terms. This allows for more accountability and consistency.

I want to change the culture and perception of corruption that has plagued our government for countless generations. I am the chief justice, but I am also a taxpayer of this state, and I simply will not stand for excessive and wasteful spending.

The citizens of West Virginia deserve the whole story. I will do my part to ensure that the appropriate

people are held responsible.

Allen H. Loughry II is chief justice of the West Virginia Supreme Court.