

Discrepancies in Dallas DA's Disclosure Reports

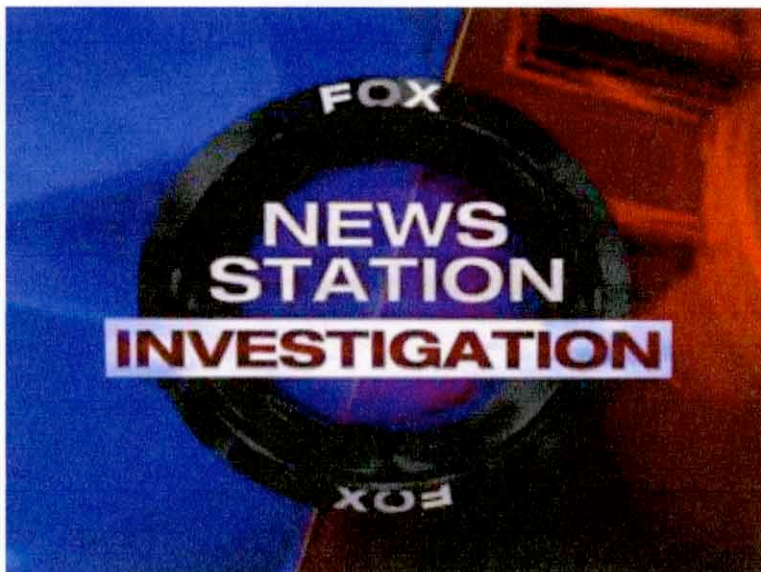
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Dallas County District Attorney Craig Watkins has made the integrity of the Dallas justice system a cornerstone of his administration. But when FOX 4 asked for an explanation of inconsistencies in his financial reports to the state, he didn't provide one. So, FOX 4 went to outside experts for help.

Elected officials are required to report everything about their personal finances. Those reports require an oath of truth. Every year elected officials like Dallas D.A. Craig Watkins must complete a personal financial statement, signed by them, witnessed by a notary public, and filed with the **Texas Ethics Commission**.



"That's where people go to find out whether you have conflicts of interest," says Tom "Smitty" Smith, with the government watchdog group, **Public Citizen**. "These are the heart and soul of disclosure in state government and in county government and they've got to be accurate," Smith continued. But FOX 4 noticed some apparent discrepancies with Craig Watkins' disclosures.

On his **2008 personal financial statement**, filed last spring, Watkins' wife, Tanya is the notary shown on the statement affidavit. FOX 4 noticed the date on the notary stamp had expired five months earlier. FOX 4 also noticed the handwriting in the space provided for the notary looks nothing like Tanya Watkins' writing on Craig Watkins' **2007 disclosure affidavit** and other public documents.

FOX 4 asked two experts, separately for their opinions. We provided them with copies of Craig Watkins' personal financial statements over the last three years and other public records.

Certified forensic document examiner **Brenda Anderson** noted how Craig Watkins tends to write the letter "Y" with the first stroke almost parallel with the baseline and randomly capitalizes the letter "A" within words. Those same characteristics, she points out, also show up in the notary space on Watkins 2008 disclosure affidavit. Anderson called the notary signatures on Watkins' 2008 and 2006 disclosures forgeries in her **detailed report**.

Handwriting expert Jeanne Parsley also reviewed the documents and provided a **detailed report**. She, too, noticed particular traits in Craig Watkins' writing, including how he tends to write the letter "Y" and the letter "A," and reached a similar conclusion about the notary handwriting on Watkins' 2008 financial statement affidavit. "It is definitely Mr. Watkins' handwriting," said Parsley.

Parsley pointed out the expired notary stamp and what she calls "pictorial evidence" that Tanya Watkins' writing on other documents is very different from what appears on the 2008 disclosure affidavit. "The signature, it is not that of Tanya Watkins," said Parsley. "This is an attempt to disguise the authorship of the signature." But something else caught Parsley's eye on the 2008 disclosure affidavit: the word "notary" in the space provided for "title of officer administering oath" is misspelled. The author spelled it "n-o-t-e-r-y."

Parsley says a comparison of Tanya Watkins' handwriting and signature on other documents shows she did actually notarize her husband's [2007 statement](#).

But on Watkins' [2006 financial statement](#), filed before the 2006 election, he used a different notary, Toyia Gamble. Parsley points out the "pictorial evidence" that the notary signature on the 2006 statement affidavit is nothing like Gamble's signature on a [2003 deed of trust](#) filed with the Dallas County Clerk. "It is not an attempt to even sign Ms. Gamble's name in the usual way that her signature would be seen," Parsley said. "Again, this is an attempt to disguise the signature," she continued.

Parsley again noted how Craig Watkins consistently writes particular letters, including the distinctive use of a capital "A," which appears in the notary's printed name on the 2006 statement affidavit. "The printed name, as well as the title of officer administering oath line is in Mr. Watkins handwriting and is not that of Toyia Gamble," said Parsley.

So, is it a crime for someone else to use a notary's stamp and signature?

"Depending on the situation, that could be interpreted as impersonating a public servant, which is a clear violation of [the penal code](#) and you can't do that," said Scott Haywood with the Texas Secretary of State's Office. Haywood says a notary public is a commissioned public servant, administering an oath of truth. "Signing for someone else and pretending to be that person - that would actually be a felony offense and you can't do that," Haywood told FOX 4.

FOX 4 asked Craig Watkins who signed his wife's and Toyia Gamble's signatures and used their notary stamps on his 2006 and 2008 financial statements. But Watkins refused repeated requests to go on camera. In a (1 [written statement](#) Watkins only says: "The Texas notary statute allows a duly licensed notary to acknowledge their spouse's endorsement." Actually, the [Texas notary law](#) says nothing about notarizing a spouse's documents. But the [Texas Notary Handbook](#) does.

"You're really not supposed to notarize for your spouse," says Haywood. "Notaries are supposed to be independent witnesses that have nothing to do with the transaction or the documents that are being attested to," he continued.

So, did an independent witness notarize Watkins financial statements? He didn't answer that in his statement. We also wanted to know about something missing from his financial disclosures...concerning his private business dealings.

[Fidelity National Title](#)'s corporate website still lists him as the direct contact for the fair branch office in Dallas.

Earlier this summer, [Watkins told FOX 4](#) he has a contract with Fidelity National Title to close real estate deals as a fee attorney. Watkins said his contract is to sell title insurance, not for private legal work. Private practice is illegal for Texas prosecutors.

So, why does Craig Watkins' name show up on 2007 real estate documents as "Craig Watkins – Attorney at Law," with his private business address? Watkins is the trustee on [several deeds of trust](#) filed with the Dallas County Clerk after he took office. One of them was filed on June 27. His wife, Tanya notarized all of them.

"You can't have it both ways," says Tom Smith. "Either you're working for the escrow agency and providing attorney services, or you're working for the county."

But is Watkins having it both ways?

On April 9th of this year, Craig Watkins filed a [certificate of ownership](#) for his title company with the Dallas County Clerk. Just three weeks later he filed his [2008 personal finance statement](#) with the Texas Ethics Commission. But in his 2008 disclosure Watkins makes no mention of owning the title business. He only checked the box for "information relates to spouse" and checked the box indicating she is "self-employed."

"If he's showing it with the county that he is the owner and not with the Ethics Commission he's not telling the truth to one or the other of the bodies," says Tom Smith.

[Texas Department of Insurance records](#) show Craig Watkins is the "attorney" and his wife, Tanya is the "employee." Both [renewed their escrow officer licenses](#) last year. But on Watkins' 2007 and 2006 disclosure statements: again, nothing about his involvement in the title business.

In his written statement, Watkins says: "If FOX 4 believes some items may not have been reported on my 2007 and/or 2008 personal finance statement, please let me know what those items are as it would have been a mere oversight." FOX 4 had already told Watkins exactly what seems be missing from his disclosures, but he would not respond any further.

Watkins did report owning the actual, physical property of his title business, but Tom Smith says that's not full disclosure. "If you own an interest or represent to a state agency or county that you are the owner of a business then you need to make full disclosure on the personal financial disclosures to the state," says Smith.

Several weeks after FOX 4 asked for an explanation, and didn't get it, Craig Watkins did finally disclose owning the title business. In late August, he filed [corrections to his personal finance statements](#) for 2006, 2007, and 2008.

On one corrected financial statement and "good faith affidavit" to the Texas Ethics Commission, Watkins states: "my wife and I jointly own Fidelity National Title. Please include this in the section that requires that I report my interest in business ventures."

Watkins submitted another correction affidavit stating: "The notary stamp on my 2008 report was outdated. Please accept the notary stamp on this correction affidavit as a correction to the original stamp on the 2008 report."

Watkins did not file anything to address the discrepancies in the notary signatures.

The Texas Ethics Commission says it accepts all reports as being filed under oath and it cannot look in to any reporting discrepancies or take any action without a complaint.

If you have a story tip for the FOX 4 I-Team to investigate send an email to iteam@kdfwfox4.com or you can call 214-720-3361 or 214-720-3365.