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Everything's fine: former Stitt adviser gets indicted for pot grift

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Grifters depend on an ethically lax system to flourish, whether it is a barbecue franchise getting fat and happy from privatization of state functions or a charter school siphoning off Oklahoma's education funds to operations in California.

They require a host that will provide such an environment, and in Oklahoma, grifters attach themselves to Gov. Kevin Stitt the way a remora latches onto a tuna.

This week, attorney Matt Stacy was charged in Garvin County District Court with recruiting "ghost owners," people with established Oklahoma residency and clean records, to serve as primary licensees for medical marijuana grow operations. Some "ghost owners" were paid to lend their name to licenses so that out-of-state owners could operate marijuana grows in Oklahoma.

According to an affidavit filed with the charges, Stacy, who was charged on 13 counts of drug trafficking, received \$60,000 from one grower to set up a "ghost" operation. In turn, some "ghost owners" received \$5,000 per year to retain each license, with at least one pulling down multiple payments for multiple licenses.

If Stacy, who denies wrongdoing, is responsible for giving individuals outside of Oklahoma choice plots in the state's cannabis gold rush, he apparently did so while serving Stitt in three capacities: as a member of Stitt's COVID-19 response team, as Stitt's adviser on a hospital surge plan, and as a member of Stitt's Governor's Council on Science and Innovation. According to The Oklahoman, Stacy and the rest of that council resigned last month as part of a planned reorganization.

Whether that reorganization of the science and innovation team was intended to bring in more flat earth society members or to distance the governor from someone getting ready to be charged for drug trafficking remains to be seen.

But Stitt was quick to let everyone know that he was redirecting Stacy's \$2,900 donation to his reelection campaign to an unspecified charity. According to The Oklahoman, Stacey also contributed the same amount to outgoing Oklahoma Attorney General John O'Connor's campaign, which stalled in the primaries.

It is never good for a governor when a former adviser is busted for drug trafficking.

Stitt campaign spokesperson Donelle Harder went hard against Oklahoma's medical marijuana laws on Monday as she distanced the campaign from Stacy.

"This is egregious and troubling," Harder told The Oklahoman. "And there is no question Oklahoma's marijuana legalization referendum created far too many opportunities for fraud, which is why Governor Stitt has been working with the legislature to strengthen law enforcement's ability to track and stop bad actors."

"Bad actors" who had a supporting role in the Stitt Administration? It's funny, because in a May 28, 2021 article by Tim Farley in the Southwest Ledger, Stacy said it was chill law enforcement that makes Oklahoma so appealing. And it was on Stitt's watch.

"There's a good market for agriculture and the way the laws are written (in Oklahoma)," he said. "The license fee is \$2,500 and it's not overly burdensome as it is in other states. There's also no caps or limits on the number of plants that can be grown and that's attractive to people. In other states, it (grow operations) only favor large companies."

With that in mind, it stands to reason that out-of-state and offshore interests might want a piece of the action and be willing to pay eligible Oklahomans to "ghost" for them.

If Stacy committed such crimes, it is emblematic of the company Stitt keeps – people like Gino DeMarco and Swadley's and ClassWallet and Epic Charter Schools and the Cato Institute's Corey DeAngelis and Ryan Walters.

They are all trying to get more than their fair share at the barbecue buffet that is conservative Oklahoma politics.