

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF MADISON COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

PHIL BRYANT

PLAINTIFF

vs.

Civil Action No.:

23-238-JM

MARY MARGARET WHITE &
DEEP SOUTH TODAY d/b/a MISSISSIPPI TODAY

DEFENDANTS

INITIAL WRITTEN DISCOVERY TO DEEP SOUTH TODAY

COMES NOW, the Honorable Phil Bryant, and serves the following interrogatories, requests for production of documents and things, and requests for admission on Deep South Today pursuant to Rules 33, 34, and 36 of the Mississippi Rules of Civil Procedure:

DEFINITIONS

1. The word “person(s)” shall mean all individuals and entities, including sole proprietorships, associations, companies, partnerships, joint ventures, corporations, individuals, and other juridical entities.

2. “Communication” includes face-to-face oral discussion, telephonic discussion, written exchanges, e-mail, text messages, voice messages, and other similar electronic communications.

3. “Document” is used in its broadest sense and includes, but is not limited to, any printed, typewritten, handwritten, graphic or recorded matter of any type and description, however denominated and however and by whomever prepared, recorded, produced, reproduced, disseminated or made, including, but not limited to, the following: Any letter, telephone bill, calls, minutes, resolutions, telegrams, cables, teletypes, report, chart, affidavit, statement, accountants’ statement, financial statement, bank records, book of account, ledger, work sheet, balance sheet,



information sheet, data sheet, log book, journal, list, book, manuscript, desk calendar, appointment book, diary, business records, personal records of employees, opinion, memorandum, summary or record or tape recording or transcript of any conversation or meeting, notes, notebooks, paper, photograph, audio or video tape, recording, microfilm, microfiche, study, contract, written agreement, check, receipt, invoice, bill, computer printout, communication, summary of interview, report and/or summary of investigations, and/or any other writing of whatever description, including computer tapes, computer cards, disk, diskettes, any information contained in any computer although not yet printed and any draft, carbon, photographic copy, preliminary take or version of any such material the contents of which differs in any respect from the original.

4. Something “relating to” or which “relates to” any given subject means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, reflects, identifies, states, refers to, deals with, or is anyway pertinent to that subject.

5. “Identify” when used concerning a person or persons means to state the name, address, and telephone number of each person, to note the name of the present employer, place of employment, and job title, if any, of each such person, and if such person was affiliated at any time with any party to this litigation, by employment or otherwise, to state the nature, including job title if any, and dates of such affiliation.

6. “Identify” when used concerning a document means to specify the nature of the document; to state the date, if any, appearing on the document, or if none, the date upon which the document was prepared; to describe the document; to identify each person who wrote, signed, dictated or otherwise participated in the preparation of the document; to identify each person, if any, who was an addressee thereof; and, if it now exists, to identify each person having custody of the document.

7. “Identify,” when used concerning communication, means to identify the persons who engage in the communication, the date on which they engaged in the communication, identify any document(s) referenced in the communication, and set forth the entire substance of the communication in full detail.

8. “You” and any pronoun variation of “you” refer to Deep South Today d/b/a Mississippi Today.

9. The “subject incident” is when Deep South Today chief executive officer Mary Margaret White made the following statement during the 16th annual Knight Media Forum in February 2023: “We’re the newsroom that broke the story about \$77 million in welfare funds, intended for the poorest people in the poorest state in the nation, being embezzled by a former governor and his bureaucratic cronies to be used on pet projects like a state-of-the-art volleyball stadium at Brett Favre’s alma mater.”

10. “Bryant” is former-Governor Phil Bryant.

11. “White” is Mary Margaret White.

**COMBINED REQUESTS FOR ADMISSION, INTERROGATORIES, & REQUESTS
FOR PRODUCTION**

Be advised that, pursuant to Miss. R. Civ. P. 36(b) and 37(a)(4), an insufficient answer or objection to any request for admission will result in a motion in which Bryant will seek an award of attorneys' fees and other reasonable expenses. Additionally, pursuant to Miss. R. Civ. P. 37(c), be advised that your failure to admit the truth of any matter requested below that Bryant later proves is truthful will result in a motion in which Bryant seeks an award of the reasonable expenses incurred in proving the matter, including attorneys' fees.

1. Please admit that White is your chief executive officer.
2. Please admit that White was your chief executive officer in February 2023.
3. Please admit that White attended the 16th annual Knight Media Forum in February 2023.
4. Please admit that a goal of the 16th annual Knight Media Forum was to discuss ways to restore trust in the news among the public.
5. Please admit that White participated in a panel discussion titled "The Key to Scaling News Start-Ups" held during the 16th annual Knight Media Forum.
6. Please admit that White discussed Mississippi Today's business and reporting during the panel discussion.
7. Please admit that White acted in the course-and-scope of her employment with Mississippi Today while participating in the panel discussion.
 - a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
 - b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

8. Please admit that White made the following statement during the 16th annual Knight Media Forum in February 2023: “We’re the newsroom that broke the story about \$77 million in welfare funds, intended for the poorest people in the poorest state in the nation, being embezzled by a former governor and his bureaucratic cronies to be used on pet projects like a state-of-the-art volleyball stadium at Brett Favre’s alma mater.”

9. Please admit that the “we’re” that White referenced in the quote is you.

10. Please admit that the “newsroom” that White referenced in the quote is your newsroom.

11. Please admit that the “former governor” that White referenced in the quote is Bryant.

12. Please admit that White accused Bryant of embezzling “\$77 million in welfare funds.”

13. Please admit that White was not influenced by alcohol or drugs when she made the quoted statement.

14. Please admit that White’s physical and mental faculties were intact when she made the quoted statement.

15. Please admit that White intended to communicate the quoted statement to everyone who attended the panel presentation.

16. Please admit that White intended all persons who heard the quoted statement to understand that she accused Bryant of embezzling \$77 million in welfare funds.

17. Please admit that you have no evidence within your custody, control, or possession to support White’s claim that Bryant embezzled \$77 million in welfare funds.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

18. Please admit that you are unaware of any evidence that proves or tends to prove that Bryant embezzled \$77 million in welfare funds.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

19. Please admit that, to the best of your knowledge, White's claim that Bryant embezzled \$77 million in welfare funds is false.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

20. Please admit that White's claim that Bryant embezzled \$77 million is defamatory.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

21. Please admit that White intended to harm or damage Bryant when she claimed he embezzled \$77 million in welfare funds.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

22. Please admit that you published the following statements on May 17, 2023:

I misspoke at a recent media conference regarding the accusations against former Governor Phil Bryant in the \$77 million welfare scandal. He has not been charged with any crime. My remark was inappropriate, and I sincerely apologize.

Mississippi Today has published at least 29 times over the course of its coverage of the welfare scandal, including multiple times in “The Backchannel” investigative series, that Gov. Bryant has not been charged with any crime. My mistake was unintentional and an inaccurate representation of the facts.

This statement will be shared across Mississippi Today’s platforms, including our website, social media, newsletter, mobile app and text service. I have requested that the video of my remark be retracted with this apology.

23. Please admit that White authored the statements published by Mississippi Today on May 17, 2023, that are outlined in the previous request.

24. Please admit that White’s May 17, 2023, statement does not retract her claim that Bryant embezzled \$77 million in welfare funds.

25. Please admit that White’s May 17, 2023, statement does not apologize for her claim that Bryant embezzled \$77 million in welfare funds.

26. Please admit that White’s May 17, 2023, statement does not state that Bryant did not embezzle \$77 million in welfare funds.

27. Please admit that former-United States Representative Ronnie Shows interviewed Anna Wolfe on his radio program on December 16, 2021.

28. Please admit that you published an edited transcription of the December 16, 2021, interview on December 23, 2021, within a news piece titled, “Mississippi Today’s Anna Wolfe explains sprawling welfare fraud case.”

29. Please admit you printed the following exchange between Shows and Wolfe:

Shows: Like they say, follow the money. Follow the money and you’ll find out.

Well, Anna, what’s your next step in your story? Are you going to keep staying on top of it or what?

Wolfe: Oh yeah. I think the big questions that I have now that I’m trying to answer are the big questions that everyone has about how far up the chain this is going to go. And if the people that are investigating this and have the power to do something about it, if they’re really going to go after everyone that they should, and everyone who should be held accountable, namely the former governor Phil Bryant.

30. Please admit that “the people that are investigating” and “have the power to do something” that Wolfe referenced include state and federal criminal prosecutors.

31. Please admit that the “this” and “it” that Wolfe referenced include unspecified criminal activities.

32. Please admit that the “something” that Wolfe referenced includes pursuing a criminal indictment and prosecution of Bryant.

33. Please admit that Wolfe publicly accused Bryant of committing unspecified crimes.

34. Please admit that Wolfe said criminal authorities should prosecute Bryant for committing unspecified crimes.

35. Please admit that Wolfe expressed concern that criminal authorities would not prosecute Bryant for committing unspecified crimes.

36. Please admit that Wolfe’s remarks are false and slanderous.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.

- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

37. Please admit that you have no source to support White's claim that Bryant embezzled \$77 million of welfare funds.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

38. Please admit that you have no source to support Wolfe's claim that Bryant committed a crime.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

39. Please admit that, before participating in the February 2023 panel discussion, White knew the panel discussion would be recorded and uploaded to the Knight Foundation's website for anyone to view on demand.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

40. Please admit that you undertook no efforts to confirm that Bryant committed a crime before you published the transcription of Wolfe's interview with Shows.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

41. Please admit that Wolfe communicated with Jacob Black while she reported on the scandal involving employees and contractors of the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

- a. Regardless of your answer, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that relate to communications between Anna Wolfe and Jacob Black.
- b. Regardless of your answer, please produce all communications between Anna Wolfe and Jacob Black.
- c. Regardless of your answer, please produce all documents that relate to communications between Anna Wolfe and Jacob Black.

42. Please admit that Wolfe communicated with Garrig Shields while she reported on the scandal involving employees and contractors of the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

- a. Regardless of your answer, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that relate to communications between Anna Wolfe and Garrig Shields.
- b. Regardless of your answer, please produce all communications between Anna Wolfe and Garrig Shields.
- c. Regardless of your answer, please produce all documents that relate to communications between Anna Wolfe and Garrig Shields.

43. Please admit that Wolfe communicated with Bob Anderson while she reported on the scandal involving employees and contractors of the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

- a. Regardless of your answer, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that relate to communications between Anna Wolfe and Bob Anderson.
- b. Regardless of your answer, please produce all communications between Anna Wolfe and Bob Anderson.
- c. Regardless of your answer, please produce all documents that relate to communications between Anna Wolfe and Bob Anderson.

44. Please admit that Wolfe communicated with Brad Pigott while she reported on the scandal involving employees and contractors of the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

- a. Regardless of your answer, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that relate to communications between Anna Wolfe and Brad Pigott.
- b. Regardless of your answer, please produce all communications between Anna Wolfe and Brad Pigott.
- c. Regardless of your answer, please produce all documents that relate to communications between Anna Wolfe and Brad Pigott.

45. Please admit that Wolfe communicated with Gerry Bufkin while she reported on the scandal involving employees and contractors of the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

- a. Regardless of your answer, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that relate to communications between Anna Wolfe and Gerry Bufkin.

- b. Regardless of your answer, please produce all communications between Anna Wolfe and Gerry Bufkin.
- c. Regardless of your answer, please produce all documents that relate to communications between Anna Wolfe and Gerry Bufkin.

46. On August 11, 2022, Mississippi Today published its 2022 Impact Report. The first section of the report is titled “Important Stories.” The first series of stories in that section is “The Backchannel.” The report states as follows regarding “The Backchannel” series:

Anna Wolfe, our poverty and investigative reporter, began publishing her investigative series “The Backchannel,” which revealed former Gov. Phil Bryant’s role in a sprawling welfare scandal. Each part of the series delved further into *Bryant’s misuse and squandering of at least \$77 million in federal funds* meant to assist nearly 588,000 of the state’s poorest residents.

Please admit that Bryant did not misuse and squander at least \$77 million in federal funds, as you stated in the Impact Report.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

47. On May 8, 2023, Mississippi Today authored and published an article titled “Anna Wolfe and Mississippi Today win Pulitzer Prize for ‘The Backchannel’ investigation.” The article states:

The investigation, published in a multi-part series in 2022, revealed for the first time *how former Gov. Phil Bryant used his office to steer the spending of millions of federal welfare dollars* — money intended to help the state’s poorest residents — *to benefit his family and friends, including NFL Hall of Fame quarterback Brett Favre.*

Please admit that Bryant did not use his office to steer the spending of millions of federal welfare dollars to benefit his family and friends, including NFL Hall of Fame quarterback Brett Favre.

- a. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please identify all persons, documents, and communications that support your answer.
- b. If your answer to this request is anything other than an unqualified admission, please produce all documents and communications that support your answer.

REQUESTS FOR PRODUCTION

1. Please produce complete copies of all insurance agreements under which an insurance business may be liable to satisfy all or part of a possible judgment in or settlement of this action or to indemnify or reimburse payments made to satisfy a judgment or settlement.

2. Please produce complete copies of all codes of ethics to which your employees adhere in performing their duties.

3. Please produce complete copies of all your written policies, procedures, guidelines, bylaws, or other requirements for your employees, reporters, officers, and directors.

4. Please produce all documents and communications that White reviewed in preparation for her February 2023 panel discussion.

5. Please produce all documents and communications related to White's claim that Bryant embezzled \$77 million in welfare funds.

6. Please produce all documents and communications related to White's claim that Bryant embezzled \$77 million in welfare funds you generated or reviewed after White's panel discussion.

7. Please produce all documents, communications, and other tangible things within your possession, custody, or control relevant to this suit's claims and defenses. If you claim that any document, communication, or item is privileged, please produce a privilege log that identifies the document, communication, or thing; that describes the content of the document, communication, or thing; that identifies the author and recipients of the document, communication, or thing; and that identifies the date the document, communication, or thing was created.

8. Please produce a detailed financial statement or any other documents and communications which reflect the following as of the date of production:

- a. a description and value of all your assets;
- b. a description and amount of all your liabilities;
- c. your net worth; and
- d. your balance sheets for the years 2022 and 2023.

9. Please produce all documents and communications you have obtained or will obtain via subpoena duces tecum in this action.

10. Please produce all documents and communications you have obtained or will obtain via authorizations and releases.

11. Please produce all documents and communications that support or substantiate all your defenses to this action, including the investigative file materials gathered and maintained by Anna Wolfe and other Mississippi Today staff.

12. Please produce documents and communications related to blogs, forums, or other websites on which any of your employees have commented regarding the plaintiff, including the username/handle under which the comments were made.

13. Please produce all communications your employees have had about the plaintiff within the past two years, including emails and text messages between Anna Wolfe and sources who were a part of her investigation.

14. Please produce all documents and communications any of your employees have authored that relate to the plaintiff in any way.

15. Please produce all documents and communications that relate to White's note that was published by Mississippi Today on May 17, 2023, including, but not limited to, all drafts, edits, and notes.

16. Please produce a complete list of your donors, the amount of the donation, and the date of the donation for the previous three years.

17. Please produce all documents and communications that discuss, record, or relate to discussions had between anyone affiliated with Mississippi Today, including Wolfe, and the “legal experts” that Adam Ganucheau referenced in the March 7, 2023, article published by The Journalist’s Resource.

INTERROGATORIES

1. Please identify all persons who may possess discoverable information, no matter whether you intend to introduce that person as a witness in support of your case or whether you intend to introduce that person for impeachment, and for each person, please set forth a summary of the testimony you anticipate the person will provide.

2. Please identify all documents and communications related to White's claim that Bryant embezzled \$77 million in welfare funds.

3. Please identify all documents and communications related to Wolfe's claim to Shows that Bryant committed a crime.

4. Please identify all documents and communications relevant to this suit's claims and defenses.

5. Please identify each person your employees spoke with regarding the plaintiff within the past three years.

6. Please identify any expert witness you have retained to offer an opinion in this suit, and for each such expert witness, provide the following:

- a. a complete statement of all opinions the witness will express and the basis and the reasons for them;
- b. the facts or data considered by the witness in forming the opinions;
- c. any exhibits that will be used to summarize or support the opinions;
- d. the witness's qualifications, including a list of all publications authored in the previous ten years;
- e. a list of all other cases in which, during the previous four years, the witness testified as an expert at trial or by deposition; and

f. a statement of the compensation for the study and testimony in the case.

7. Please identify every individual you will or may call as a witness at the trial of this action, specify them as “will call” or “may call” witnesses, and provide a summary of the testimony you anticipate each witness will provide.

8. Please identify all persons with whom any of your employees or contractors communicated regarding a retraction, apology, or correction of your claim that Bryant embezzled \$77 million of welfare funds, and for each person, please set forth a summary of the communication.

9. Please identify all persons with whom your employees, contractors, officers, and directors have communicated about the subject incident; identify the employee, contractor, officer, or director who engaged in the communication; identify the date of the communication; and provide a complete recitation of each person’s communication to the other.

10. Please state whether you disciplined White or Wolfe for their false and misleading remarks, and if you disciplined either of them, please explain the disciplinary action.

11. Please identify all communications any of your officers or directors have had with Adam Ganucheau, White, and Anna Wolfe relating to the following:

- a. The subject incident;
- b. Bryant;
- c. White’s note published by Mississippi Today on May 17, 2023;
- d. Communications that Anna Wolfe has had with any person regarding her reporting of the scandal involving employees and contractors of the Mississippi Department of Human Services;

- e. Communications that Adam Ganuchau has had with any person while Mississippi Today reported on the scandal involving employees and contractors of the Mississippi Department of Human Services;
- f. Anna Wolfe's December 16, 2021, interview with former-U.S. Congressman Ronnie Shows; and
- g. All documents and communications that Anna Wolfe relied on to support her statements in her December 16, 2021, interview with former-U.S. Congressman Ronnie Shows.

12. Please identify all communications that anyone affiliated with Mississippi Today, including Wolfe, had with all "legal experts" referenced by Ganuchau in the March 7, 2023, article published by The Journalist's Resource.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED, this 26th day of July 2023.

By: 
William M. Quin II

**Attorney for Plaintiff, the Honorable Phil Bryant,
64th Governor of the State of Mississippi**

OF COUNSEL:

William M. Quin II (MS Bar # 10834)
W. Thomas McCraney (MS Bar # 10171)
MCCRANEY MONTAGNET QUIN & NOBLE, PLLC
602 Steed Rd., Ste. 200
Ridgeland, MS 39157
Telephone: (601) 707-5725
Facsimile: (601) 510-2939
Email: wquin@mmqnlaw.com
tmccraney@mmqnlaw.com

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, William M. Quin II, attorney for Phil Bryant, do hereby certify that a true and correct copy of the foregoing document has been served along with copies of the summons and complaint to:

Deep South Today
750 Woodlands Parkway, Ste. 100
Ridgeland, Mississippi 39157

Mary Margaret White
3908 Cambridge Street
Jackson, Mississippi 39216

This, the 26th day of July 2023.



William M. Quin II