

Clerk sorry for misuse of county fax machine

■ Democratic leader pushes for election panel

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CHAMPAIGN — Champaign County Clerk Mark Shelden says he is sorry for using a county fax machine to transmit an order for a political advertisement to a local radio company.

"The only thing that occurred to me was I had two choices," said Shelden, a Republican who admitted that he sent the fax Thursday afternoon. "I could run out of the office and take 45 minutes to bring it in to the radio station during the busiest time of the year, or I could fax it over there."



SHELDEN



FABRI

Shelden said the radio ads were for Champaign County Auditor candidate Brad Jones' campaign, and he was helping Jones buy the radio airtime.

Shelden violated the Champaign County ethics ordinance by using county resources for assisting a political campaign, said county Democratic Party Chairman Tony Fabri.

Fabri said he intends to write a letter to Champaign County State's Attorney John Piland notifying him about the situation. Fabri said a violation of the county's ethics ordinance could result in a fine of up to \$2,500, up to a year in jail and dismissal or discipline.

Fabri said Monday he discovered the faxed document while

Fax

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looking through a folder containing political advertisements at Illini Radio Group, 2603 W. Bradley Ave., Champaign.

"To my surprise, it had a fax tagline saying it had been faxed from the Champaign County clerk's office," Fabri said.

"We've always had some suspicions that there is politics occurring in the county clerk's office," said Fabri, citing past accusations against Shelden of voter disenfranchisement. "This is really the first time we've had evidence."

"That's just rumor-mongering and it's not true," said Shelden, who said he normally is careful about keeping politics and county clerk duties separate. "We are working our tails off there, and we don't have time to do that."

Fabri said he was surprised Shelden was "so reckless," and it illustrated why the county should create a bipartisan countywide election commission. The Nov. 2 ballot will ask voters whether the commission should

be created, essentially stripping election duties from Shelden.

Shelden contends creating an election commission would be expensive and unfair because the members would not be elected officials. Two members of the majority party, currently Democrats, and one Republican would be appointed to the commission by the county board. Illinois law allows Shelden to join the commission as his party's representative.

"As it is now, he is unaccountable," Fabri said. "No one knows what is going on behind closed doors, and that's why it's so important."

"I won't do it again because people like Tony Fabri will make ridiculous charges," said Shelden who also accused county Democrats of using public resources for political gain. "It's just amazing that they would find this one thing to hang their hat on to create an election commission."

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