

DeKalb CEO accused of trying to extort vendors

KATE BRUMBACK - Associated Press - Associated Press

A grand jury indictment on Tuesday accuses DeKalb County CEO Burrell Ellis of threatening to withhold county business from companies that didn't contribute to his campaign.

The 15-count indictment accuses Ellis of trying to extort campaign contributions from companies and their employees. The indictment also alleges that Ellis instructed the county's director of purchasing and contracting to prevent certain companies from getting business because they didn't respond to his solicitations and didn't contribute to his campaign.

A phone message left at a number listed for Ellis was not immediately returned Tuesday evening.

Ellis tried to get a campaign contribution from a company called Ciber Inc., and an employee there, the indictment says. He threatened the employee, saying he would contact the company's CEO to say the county wouldn't be giving him their business anymore because of the employee's poor customer service, the indictment says.

In another case, he threatened to withhold county business from Power and Energy Services, Inc., after an employee didn't respond to his campaign contribution requests and didn't give money, the indictment says. He then instructed the director of purchasing and contracting not to give the company any more work and to put a note in its file saying the firm didn't return phone calls, the indictment says.

Ellis had county workers compiling lists during working hours of companies that had contracts so he could solicit campaign contributions, the indictment says.

Ellis faces a variety of charges, including criminal attempt to commit theft by extortion, conspiracy in restraint of free and open competition, and theft by taking, among others.

The office of county Commissioner Elaine Boyer said the commissioners were meeting individually with the county attorney for briefings on the situation and to determine what their next steps should be.

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