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NEWS

MURRIETA: Traffic camera exec wanted to fight initiative

Emails show similarities between situations locally and elsewhere where residents tried to get rid of red light cameras

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BY JOHN F. HILL / STAFF WRITER
Published: July 20, 2012 9:09 p.m.



John F. Hill, FILE PHOTO

Efforts to stall an anti-camera voter initiative in Murrieta by an executive who worked for a red light camera company may shed some light on who is behind a lawsuit challenging the initiative.

The executive, Bill Kroske, tried to enlist Murrieta officials's help in going to court to fight the ballot initiative, according to an email obtained through a records request. The message echoes a plan Kroske laid out in Washington state, where he said American

Traffic Solutions hired a lawyer to fight a similar voter initiative.

The company has so far refused to directly answer questions about whether it hired the high-powered Sacramento attorney involved with the Murrieta suit.

âATS is not a party to the current lawsuit,â spokesman Charles Territo has said several times, even when pressed about whether the company has had any financial involvement.

Territo said Kroske left the Arizona-based traffic camera company last year. He was suspended after a Washington newspaper reported that he appeared to pose as a local resident who supported red light cameras in comments on the paper's website.

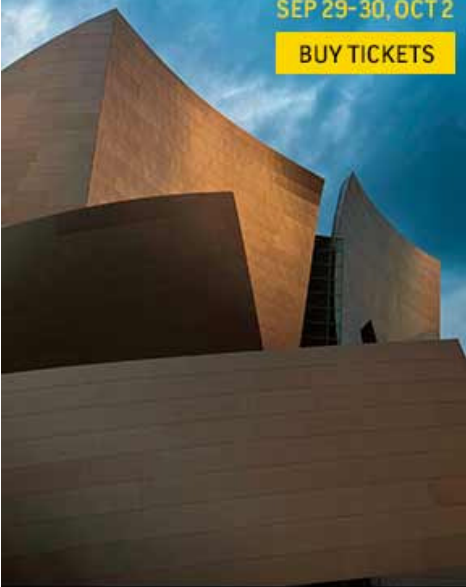
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Kroske still had a company email account to finish up old business but wasn't instructed to solicit help for a lawsuit in Murrieta, Territo said.

The Murrieta initiative seeks to ban traffic cameras from the city. Local activist Diana Serafin got the issue on the November ballot after collecting more than 4,000 verified signatures on a petition.

Last month, a lawsuit was filed in Riverside Superior Court to block the initiative from going before voters.

Murrieta resident Steve Flynn is the suit's plaintiff. Flynn is the city's former Public Safety and Traffic Committee chairman.

He has repeatedly said he doesn't know who is paying for his attorney, Charles H. Bell Jr., a prominent lawyer who also represents the California Republican Party.

REQUEST DENIED

In March, Murrieta officials told the camera company the city would not renew its \$19,400-per-month contract until the ballot initiative was settled.

Kroske emailed Murrieta Mayor Doug McAllister in early April.

"We had thought we were in accord to help defeat the initiative in November, as it is bad policy to have certain city decisions, such as public safety, decided by public vote," Kroske wrote. "In Washing (sic) State we have fought this approach in the courts and at every level." "We have attempted to have a discussion on such an option for you."

Murrieta police Sgt. Jay Froboese, who runs the city's traffic camera program, said Murrieta officials told the company the city wanted nothing to do with a lawsuit. While the Police Department supports the cameras, the city wants to let residents have their say at the ballot box, he said.

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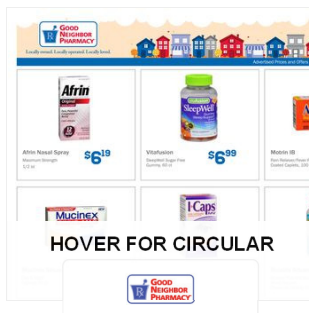
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