

McCurtain County jail supervisor indicted in federal case tied to infamous recording

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Spencer Humphrey/KFOR

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OKLAHOMA CITY (KFOR) — More than two years after an audio recording caught McCurtain County officials longing for the days when Black people could be lynched while plotting to kill local newspaper reporters, a former McCurtain County jail supervisor plans to plead guilty to federal charges in a case that ties back to that now-infamous audio. The March 2023 audio, recorded and first reported by the McCurtain Gazette, captured then-Sheriff Kevin Clardy, a then-county commissioner, a sheriff's deputy and a jail official longing for the days of when law enforcement could abuse and hang Black people. "If it was back in the day, when that when Alan Marshton would take a damn black guy and whoop their *** and throw him in the cell? Hell I'd run for ***ing sheriff," Then-McCurtain County Commissioner Mark Jennings said. "Yeah, well it's not like that no more," Clardy responded. The officials also discussed killing and burying two McCurtain Gazette reporters. "I know where two big deep holes are if you ever need them," Jennings said. "I've got an excavator," Clardy replied. The comments sparked statewide outrage and protests. "You know, I want to cry about it," one protestor told News 4's Tulsa partner KOKI-TV outside a May 2023 county meeting. "It's ugly and it's cruel," another said. Governor Kevin Stitt called for the officials to resign.

Commissioner Jennings stepped down, but Sheriff Clardy refused to resign. Many residents wanted criminal charges, but Attorney General Gentner Drummond said the comments, while indefensible, were not criminal.

No charges were filed, though Clardy later lost his re-election bid. Fast forward to this week: a federal court indicted a McCurtain County jail supervisor, accusing him of conspiring with other leaders to orchestrate an attack on a McCurtain County jail inmate in 2021. The inmate filed a lawsuit in 2022 claiming Clardy and the sheriff's deputy later heard in the 2023 recording conspired with the jail supervisor to plan and carry out the 2021 jail attack. Following the 2022 lawsuit's filing, the McCurtain Gazette investigated the case, and its reporters later became the subject of the violent talk heard in the 2023 recording. This week, the jail supervisor filed a notice of intent to plead guilty. That has residents like Sharon Wooten, who helped lead the "McCurtain County Movement" for change, feeling a measure of vindication. "Yes, it does," Wooten said. "But we definitely don't want this one case to identify as this as being a conclusion, because we know that there is more to be investigated." She said she hopes the development could push Attorney General Drummond to reconsider his earlier decision not to pursue criminal charges against others involved. "I do not feel that there was full accountability there," she

added. "I think they should have had to pay for their actions and behavior." The jail supervisor is set to formally plead guilty to a federal felony charge of conspiracy against rights at his next hearing on Sept. 17 in Muskogee.

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