



Emails: LIBA declined police help at Fischer event

[NICHOLE MANNA Lincoln Journal Star](#) Mar 26, 2017

The day protesters shouted and banged on windows outside a Lincoln meeting where Sen. Deb Fischer spoke, KLIN radio host Coby Mach said on Drive Time Lincoln that "a basic level of protection must be offered by police management when these things are going to occur."

But police protection was offered, according to emails between Mach, who also works as president of the Lincoln Independent Business Association, which hosted Fischer on Feb. 21, and Police Chief Jeff Bliemeister.

"We do it on Husker gameday," Mach added during his radio show. "I think Congressman Fortenberry has a town hall or two coming up and there will be others as well."

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry did have a town hall just a couple weeks after Fischer's appearance. The congressman hired and paid for six off-duty Lincoln police officers to attend



Protesters crowd into a hallway inside the Grand Manse as people leave a Lincoln Independent Business Association luncheon at which Sen. Deb Fischer spoke in February. Police officers turned the crowds back outside when they began banging on windows at the end of the luncheon. *ERIC GREGORY, Journal Star file photo*

and stand by in case they were needed. And off-duty officers are around during Husker football games because the university pays for them.

Lincoln Public Schools also hires off-duty officers for various sporting events. During the 2016-17 school year, LPS spent \$21,837 on the service, spokeswoman Mindy Burbach said. It's the same offer Mach and LIBA were given for Fischer's event, according to police.

Emails obtained by the Journal Star show Mach sent Bliemeister information on Feb. 15 that The Betsy Riot and Indivisible Lincoln would protest the event, including a Facebook post from a protester saying, "We were also going to undercover (sic) inside and chant during her speech."

Capt. Jason Stille responded to Mach, telling him they would make on-duty officers aware of the event so they could monitor the immediate area. Five of those officers stood outside with protesters.

The chief's administrative assistant, who handles the hiring of off-duty officers, emailed Mach on Feb. 16 telling him about the hourly rates. She also attached the required paperwork he'd need in case he decided to utilize off-duty officers for the luncheon.

The department urges groups who want to hire off-duty officers to budget \$75-85 per hour, per officer. There's a three-hour minimum.

The police department also requires two more items from people wishing to hire off-duty officers: proof of liability insurance and workers' compensation, Bliemeister said.



Coby Mach



Chief Jeff Bliemeister

If a group cannot provide those items, they have the option to have the city pay for the officers, and then reimburse the city.

Either way, whoever requests off-duty officers will pay for them.

Bliemeister said the department fills a majority of the off-duty requests it receives after considering the event, the number of officers requested and the location. Full-time employees are limited to 16 hours of outside employment per week, department policy says.

After some email exchanges between Mach and LPD, Mach eventually told the police chief LIBA wanted to go on the record "as disagreeing with the decisions being made."

The emails didn't make clear what decisions Mach disagreed with and when asked by the Journal Star, he declined to answer. During a short phone call with a Journal Star reporter, Mach rejected claims that he said the city should have paid for security at LIBA's private Fischer event inside the Grand Manse.

In an email from Bliemeister to the mayor's office, the chief said "Coby just called me and really thinks we should be spending more resources to protect a dignitary coming to our community."

Bliemeister also said he believed Mach wasn't happy with the department's patrolling of the event, the number of officers it had present or the fact that no one was arrested.

The emails say Bliemeister believed Mach, who last year called for the city to hire more officers, wanted the department to put on-duty officers inside the room during the luncheon.

"This is a constant balancing act," the chief wrote. "Protecting First Amendment rights and enforcement. We will see what we can do better and will try to meet with the organizers of Indivisible Lincoln, who had a parade permit, and let them know a line was crossed."

During the meeting, about 150 protesters gathered outside. At one point, they made their way into the building and ended up pounding on windows to the room where the meeting was held, Bliemeister said.

Mach said in a public Facebook post that he believes "LPD will learn a lot from this event."

Asked what he meant by that, Mach sent an emailed statement to the Journal Star: "LIBA would like to thank both our private security and the Lincoln police. When protesters entered the building and began pounding on glass windows, police has the difficult task of dispersing the crowd while also ensuring that no one was hurt, no property damage occurred, and that the situation didn't escalate."

Off-duty officers with LPD can be hired for a variety of reasons. The department's biggest request is providing coverage during Husker football games, mostly with traffic, Bliemeister said. UNL spends about \$50,000 a year on off-duty officers.

For the Lincoln Marathon, about 88 on- and off-duty officers work. Bliemeister said it's not possible to send on-duty officers to every event, because resources need to be balanced around the city. "We still have to deploy officers to emergencies," he said.