Docket #2228 Date Filed: 11/15/2013

IN THE UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ALABAMA SOUTHERN DIVISION

IN RE:)	
)	Case No.: 11-05736-TBB-9
JEFFERSON COUNTY, ALABAMA,)	
)	Chapter 9 Proceeding
DEBTOR.)	

WILSON RATE PAYERS' INITIAL REPLY TO OMNIBUS REPLY BRIEF IN SUPPORT OF PLAN CONFIRMATION

COME NOW Charles E. Wilson, David Harris, III, Mike Agnesia (three Jefferson County, Alabama sewer rate payers) ("Wilson Rate Payers" or "Rate Payers"), and submit this Initial Reply to the Omnibus Reply Brief in Support of Plan Confirmation filed by Jefferson County ("the County") on November 13, 2013.¹ Rate Payers are real parties in interest, have filed a Claim,² and each is a special tax payer pursuant to 11 U.S.C. Section 1109(b). In a transparent effort to disregard the merits of the Rate Payers' objections, they County has resorted to attacking the messenger, rather than the message. Specifically, the County attacks the credibility, ethics, and veracity of Rate Payers' expert and consultant, James H. White ("White"). As will be discussed herein, no argument advanced by the County serves as a basis for disqualification of White or his opinions, and no violation of any MSRB, SEC, or legal rule or regulation has taken place that would serve to disqualify White or counsel for the Rate Payers. In support of this filing, Rate Payers state as follows:

I. THE COUNTY'S GENERAL OBJECTIONS TO WHITE'S REPORT AND AFFIDAVIT

The County's objections and argument related to the opinions and testimony of White boil

² Currently pending before this Court is Rate Payer's Motion for New Trial, or the Alter or Amend its Judgment on Rate Payers' Claim (Doc. 2164).



¹ Rate Payers herein expressly reserve their right to supplement this filing with additional materials, evidence, and or arguments.

down to two points: (1) weight and credibility issues, not issues of admissibility, and (2) claims that his opinion on the 40-year maturity period of the bonds is precluded as being "privileged and confidential information of the County" by virtue of White serving as a financial advisor to the County during the period when such maturity periods were discussed. (Doc. 2203, pp. 46-50, fn. 35, p. 48).

It is important to point out that the County cites NO legal authority for the exclusion of White or his opinions other than those based on disclosure of allegedly "privileged and confidential" information related to the 40-year bond maturity period. Indeed, no *Daubert* challenge is raised, nor is any case law cited which sets forth any legal bases for a limitation on or exclusion of White's opinions outside of alleged confidentiality. Indeed, every argument raised against White (i.e., claims that he has "switched sides," or "flip-flopped" his position) are ones which go to the weight and credibility this Court should accord his opinion, not issues of admissibility. *See e.g., Jones v. Otis Elevator Co.*, 861 F.2d 655, 663 (11th Cir. 1988) ("[W]eakness in the underpinnings of the expert's opinion go to its weight rather than its admissibility.) The County has not raised any precedent which would serve as a bases for the preclusion of White or his testimony, and as such, any argument related to weight and credibility, rather than issues of admissibility, is due to be rejected and is without merit.

II. WHITE WAS NOT UNDER ANY BINDING CONFIDENTIALITY AGREMENT AND DID NOT DISCLOSE PROTECTED, PRIVILEGED, OR CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION.

Contrary to the assertions of the County, White was not legally bound under any existing confidentiality agreement which prevented him from disclosing any information contained in his affidavit or the report prepared by Porter, White & Company, Inc. The County has not cited to

any confidentiality agreement which would have precluded White from discussing or disclosing information he learned during his tenure as a financial advisor to the County during 2007 and/or 2008. Indeed, the County's filing is nothing more than "Since we don't like the message, let's attack the messenger" – heaping scurrilous allegations on White due to the fact that he has pointed out serious potential legal and factual deficiencies with the plan which may serve as bars to confirmation. The County has not produced any documented evidence which would serve as a preclusive effect to White's opinions, and only claims that he was acting as a "fiduciary," which allegedly would prevent him from disclosing the information related to the County's deliberations on the 40-year bond maturity period. (Doc. 2203, p. 48, fn. 35 – alleging that the only "privileged and confidential" information disclosed relates to legal opinions supposedly issued by the County's attorney's on whether the maturity of the sewer debt can be extended beyond 40 years).

What is lacking from the County's filing is candor. What is not disclosed to the Court is that financial advisors were not considered "fiduciaries" for purposes of the securities or financial industries until the passage of the Dodd-Frank Act in October 2010. As this Court is well aware, the business of providing financial advice to public entities is highly regulated at the federal level, by legislative acts, the Municipal Securities Regulatory Board ("MSRB"), and the Securities and Exchange Commission ("SEC"). Prior to the passage of Dodd-Frank, municipal advisors were not fiduciaries under federal statutes or regulations. Dodd-Frank amended Section 15B(c)(1) of the 1934 Act to provide that municipal advisors are fiduciaries. There was no grandfathering provision contained in Dodd-Frank which retroactively applied to create a confidentiality burden on the financial advisor for prior work. It is interesting to note that Dodd-Frank itself does not even speak to the meaning of a municipal advisor's fiduciary duty; however, such duty has been discussed (in

2011) by the SEC in its *Study on Investment Advisers and Broker-Dealers: As Required by Section* 913 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act," published in January 2011.³ In that study, the SEC stated the following:

Fundamental to the federal fiduciary standard are the duties of loyalty and care. The duty of loyalty requires an adviser to serve the best interests of its clients, which includes an obligation not to subordinate the clients' interests to its own. An adviser's duty of care requires it to make a reasonable investigation to determine that it is not basing its recommendations on materially inaccurate or incomplete information.

Id. at p. 22.4

In the instant case, no assertion has been made, nor can a credible one be asserted, that White has violated the best interests of a client or subordinated the clients' interests to his own. Even **IF** a viable argument could be advanced on this issue, there was NO fiduciary relationship between White and the County in 2007 or 2008 when these meetings took place. As such, there can be no breach of privilege or confidentiality because a fiduciary relationship did not exist and no confidential relationship existed which would require White to keep such information confidential in perpetuity. No allegation or facts have been presented that White, or his company, were (1) hired for legal services; (2) held themselves out to be a fiduciary of the County or were ever regarded as such by the County or its employees; or (3) that there was any binding confidentiality agreement in place between the parties which would prevent White from disclosing such information some five to six years later. Without such facts, evidence, documents, or substantiated arguments, the County's filing regarding White amounts to nothing more than a

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³ It should be noted that both the passage of Dodd-Frank and the SEC study herein cited post-dated White's tenure as a municipal advisor to the County by more than two (2) years and do not serve as a bar to White's opinions in this bankruptcy proceeding.

⁴ A copy of said SEC study is publicly available at http://www.sec.gov/news/studies/2011/913studyfinal.pdf.

meritless and baseless attack on the messenger for a message which strikes too close to home for the County's liking. Based on the above cited total lack of evidence, exhibits, or any other bases for the County's requested exclusion of White, such request is due to be denied in its entirety.

Respectfully submitted this 15th day of November, 2013.

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on the <u>15th</u> day of November, 2013, I electronically filed the foregoing with the Clerk of the Court using the CM-ECF system and served same in accordance with the Master Service List, attached hereto as Exhibit "A."

/s/ Joshua L. Firth
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EXHIBIT

A

Exhibit "A"

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AMT Medical Staffing, Inc. 2 20 th Street North Suite 1360 Birmingham, AL 35203	Brice Building Co., LLC 201 Sunbelt Parkway Birmingham, AL 35211
John Plott Company Inc. 2804 Rice Mine Road NE Tuscaloosa, AL 35406	Laboratory Corporation of America 430 South Spring Street Burlington, NC 27215 Attention: Legal Department