



**OFFICE OF THE STATE ATTORNEY
SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA
PASCO AND PINELLAS COUNTIES**

BERNIE McCABE
State Attorney

November 27, 2000

The Honorable Jeb Bush
Governor, State of Florida
The Capitol, Room 209
Tallahassee, FL 32301

RE: Executive Order 00-215

Dear Governor Bush:

Pursuant to Executive Order 00-215, this office was assigned to investigate all matters arising out of investigations conducted by the Tampa Police Department and Florida Department of Law Enforcement related to Harry Lee Coe, III and his death. This office has conducted that investigation, which included interviewing 15 witnesses and reviewing over 250 reports from the Tampa Police Department and Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Also reviewed were numerous financial records, newspaper articles, media videos, photographs of the scene, and other relevant areas, and reports from the Medical Examiner's Office of the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit. As a result, we have determined as follows:

On July 13, 2000 the body of State Attorney Harry Lee Coe, III was discovered underneath the LeeRoy Selmon Expressway in Tampa, Florida. The body was approximately 100 feet away from Mr. Coe's residence at the Bay Oaks Apartment Complex. The cause of death was a self-inflicted contact gunshot wound to the left lateral eyebrow. The time of death was between 11:00 p.m. on July 12, 2000 and 7:00 a.m. on July 13, 2000. The firearm used was a .38 caliber Smith & Wesson pistol that belonged to Mr. Coe. Found near the body was a gun cleaning kit that was opened and apparently had been used to clean the pistol prior to its use. The cleaning kit had been purchased at a Sports Authority on July 8, 2000, several days prior to the suicide.

In reviewing the circumstances surrounding Mr. Coe's life just prior to his death, we have found a series of pending circumstances that we feel influenced Mr. Coe's actions.

With regard to his personal financial situation, Mr. Coe had a negative net worth of approximately \$150,000 with the majority of the debt being high interest credit cards. His bank records revealed a large number of checks that had been dishonored. The fees associated with those return checks for a 15-month period prior to his death were in excess of \$5,000. In addition, he had monthly liabilities of \$4,500 associated from his two prior divorce settlements. The bank records, coupled with the large number of dishonored checks held by local dog tracks (\$47,000), suggests that his financial indebtedness was largely a result of excess pari-mutuel wagering by Mr. Coe. He had grossly misrepresented his financial position on the financial disclosure forms required to be filed in conjunction with his reelection campaign.

A review of Mr. Coe's campaign account records, in conjunction with his personal account, indicates a commingling of campaign funds with several campaign deposits being made into his personal account. Analysis has revealed that Mr. Coe used these campaign funds for personal purposes. Further, under existing Florida Law, Mr. Coe established an office account in the amount of \$4,000 after his 1996 reelection campaign. Investigation has shown that this account was used as a "revolving credit account" with the \$4,000 being used for personal purposes. As a result of this activity, Mr. Coe filed several false quarterly office account reports with the Florida Division of Elections.

Additionally, the resulting financial problems apparently led Mr. Coe to borrow \$36,500 from several of his employees and a friend. At the time of his death, \$27,500 of these funds remained unpaid. On required financial disclosure forms, Mr. Coe reported some but not all of the employee loans. He also failed to report the total amount of these loans.

Evidence was also found to suggest Mr. Coe applied for and received travel mileage reimbursements in the years 1997 and 1999 in the amount of \$733.12 that he was not entitled to receive.

Prior to his death, Mr. Coe's office was presented with a public records request pursuant to Chapter 119, Florida State Statutes, for internet sites contained on his office laptop computer. Our investigation revealed that an unsuccessful attempt was made, at Mr. Coe's direction, to delete these records by an employee of the State Attorney's Office. The employee was specifically advised by Mr. Coe that there were no public records on the computer. A Florida Department of Law Enforcement laboratory examination of the computer discovered that between December 19, 1998 and the time of Mr. Coe's death, this

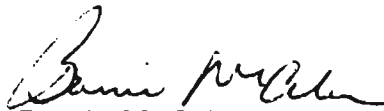
computer was used to access web sites relating to greyhound racing several hundred times. Mr. Coe had publicly denied accessing these sites.

In conclusion it is our opinion at the time of his death, Mr. Coe's financial situation was in disarray – he was heavily indebted and continued to gamble large amounts of money. Also, close friends indicated Mr. Coe was distraught over the unexpected recent death of his niece. Less than 24 hours prior to his death, he had been informed by your office of a pending Florida Department of Law Enforcement investigation into the circumstances surrounding the employee loans and the public records issue regarding the laptop computer. It is our belief that the likelihood of the disclosure of the aforementioned matters coupled with the negative impact on his campaign and community standing, along with the recent death of his niece, influenced him to take his life.

There was no evidence found of any corrupt or external influences that could be a factor in his death; however, it should be noted that numerous rumors and innuendoes were brought to our attention from a variety of sources. The allegations were investigated and found to be unsubstantiated and were therefore not made a part of this report.

Having completed the duties as assigned, I respectfully request to be released from any further responsibility in this matter.

Sincerely yours,



Bernie McCabe
State Attorney

BMcC/clg