

Colorado to Examine Lauren Boebert's Mileage Claims and Tax Liens

The state's attorney general has referred for review a fraud complaint from the group that targeted Representative Madison Cawthorn, in a sign of trouble for the first-term congresswoman.



By Jonathan Weisman

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WASHINGTON — Colorado officials are examining allegations that Representative Lauren Boebert, a Republican representing the state's western half, inflated the mileage she logged on the campaign trail in 2020 and then used more than \$20,000 in reimbursements from donors to pay off years of tax liens on her restaurant.

The allegations have bounced around liberal circles since The Denver Post first reported in February 2021 that Ms. Boebert had cashed two checks from her campaign totaling \$22,259 for mileage reimbursement, a figure that equated to 38,712 miles — well more than 24,901-mile circumference of the planet.

But the same group that unleashed a torrent of unflattering information about Representative Madison Cawthorn that helped defeat his bid for a second term in North Carolina last month has brought the matter to the Colorado attorney general's office, which has referred it for an interagency examination.

Janet Drake, the deputy Colorado attorney general for criminal justice, told David B. Wheeler, one of the founders of the American Muckrakers PAC, on Tuesday that her department would work with the state's Department of Revenue and Department of Labor and Employment "to investigate the issue."

Lawrence Pacheco, a spokesman for the Colorado attorney general, confirmed that the matter had been forwarded to an interagency group "to evaluate the allegations and whether legal actions are justified." He said the attorney general, Philip J. Weiser, a Democrat, would have no further comment.

Aides to Ms. Boebert said on Wednesday that she had accounted for the mileage she logged. The campaign did have to revise the initial total under scrutiny, but that was because other reimbursable travel expenses, such as hotel costs, had been combined with mileage.

And, they said, she paid off the tax liens before the reimbursements reached her bank account.

Campaign finance inquiries can be notoriously slow, and this one is unlikely to yield conclusions before Colorado's primary on June 28, when Ms. Boebert, a right-wing freshman known for her performative antics and confrontational outbursts, faces State Senator Don Coram, who is campaigning against "fringe leaders" who "act more like out-of-touch celebrities than members of Congress." The inquiry may not gain much traction before the general election in November.

More concerning to Ms. Boebert might be the attention from the Muckrakers PAC, which released a string of sexually explicit videos of Mr. Cawthorn and negative testimonials from the congressman's former aides, which helped lead to his defeat in the Republican primary in North Carolina last month.

"Colorado deserves more than an irresponsible, loudmouth member of Congress," said Mr. Wheeler, the PAC's president. "Maybe it's time for Boebert to look for another line of work."

At the core of the inquiry are eight tax liens from the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment totaling \$20,000 and filed against Ms. Boebert from August 2016 to February 2020 for failure to pay unemployment premiums on her business, Shooters Grill.

In late 2020, Ms. Boebert reimbursed herself for mileage from the 2020 campaign and paid off the liens.

"As you are both fully aware, utilizing an illegal source of funds or ill-gotten funds to pay off a tax lien is illegal in Colorado and under federal law," the Muckrakers complaint to the attorney general stated, adding, "That is the very definition of ill-gotten funds."

Colorado Public Radio tracked the 129 public events of Ms. Boebert's 2020 campaign, from Denver to Grand Junction to Pueblo, Colo. Even assuming that she drove round-trip to each event from her home in Silt, Colo., without connecting events that were close together, the analysis fell about 9,000 miles short of the nearly 39,000 miles claimed. Several months of the 2020 campaign were also shut down by the coronavirus pandemic.

Under scrutiny, Ms. Boebert's campaign later amended its claims to say the mileage reimbursement included other travel expenses and hotel rooms, though it still listed \$17,280 in mileage reimbursements.

Complaints to the Federal Election Commission have gone nowhere, and a lawyer for the House Ethics Committee declined to say whether the panel was examining the issue. The Democratic attorney general of Colorado may be more sympathetic, however.

"This is not an attack on Lauren Boebert," Mr. Wheeler insisted. "Had Representative Boebert paid her restaurant staff properly and also paid the unemployment premiums to the State of Colorado, an investigation never would have been necessary."

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