



FACT

FOUNDATION FOR
ACCOUNTABILITY
AND CIVIC TRUST

October 1, 2018

Ms. Lisa J. Stevenson
Acting General Counsel
Office of the General Counsel
Federal Election Commission
1050 First Street, NE Washington, D.C. 20463

COMPLAINT BEFORE THE FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

RE: Request for Investigation into Aftab Pureval and Aftab for Ohio's Use of Non-Federal Funds

Dear Ms. Stevenson,

The Foundation for Accountability and Civic Trust (FACT) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting accountability, ethics, and transparency in government and civic arenas. We achieve this mission by hanging a lantern over public officials who put their own interests over the interests of the public good. FACT files this complaint requesting the Federal Election Commission (FEC) immediately investigate and take appropriate enforcement action to address apparent violations of the Federal Election Campaign Act as amended (Act) and Commission regulations by federal congressional candidate Aftab Pureval and his authorized campaign committee, Aftab for Ohio.¹

This complaint is based upon media reports and public filings, information and belief, that Pureval has used a county campaign fund that is not subject to federal law for his federal congressional race. Pureval is a candidate for U.S. House of Representatives in

¹ This complaint is filed pursuant to 52 U.S.C. § 30109(a)(1) against Aftab Pureval, candidate for U.S. House of Representatives in Ohio's First Congressional District, and Pureval's authorized campaign committee, Aftab for Ohio, PO Box 713, Cincinnati, OH, 45201.

Ohio's First Congressional District. Currently, Pureval is also the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts, to which he was elected in 2016 and is not up for re-election until 2020. Yet, in 2018, Pureval used his county campaign account to accept donations and pay several expenses that appear to be directly related to his federal congressional campaign. This type of activity directly violates federal election laws, including contribution limits and reporting requirements.² The Commission must immediately investigate and enforce the law.³

FACTS

Pureval was elected Hamilton County Clerk of Courts in 2016. His clerk campaign fund is a non-federal fund organized under Ohio law, and he is required to file Ohio Campaign Finance Reports. According to Pureval's most recent state filing for the reporting period of January through June 2018, Pureval raised \$31,320 during that time.⁴ Pureval announced his candidacy for federal office on January 31, 2018, after which he raised \$31,170 of the \$31,320 of clerk contributions.⁵ This includes \$30,000 of contributions from Pureval's mother, who also made the maximum contribution to Pureval's federal campaign.⁶

² 52 U.S.C. §§ 30116 (contribution limits), 30104 (reporting requirements).

³ "If the Commission, upon receiving a complaint . . . has reason to believe that a person has committed or is about to commit, a violation of the [Act] . . . [t]he Commission shall make and investigation of such alleged violation." 52 U.S.C. § 30109(a)(2); 11 C.F.R. § 111.4(a).

⁴ Friends of Aftab Pureval, Ohio Campaign Finance Report for Hamilton County Clerk of Courts, filed Jul. 31, 2018 (attached as Exhibit A).

⁵ Aftab for Ohio, Statement of Organization, Federal Election Commission, filed Jan. 29, 2018; Howard Wilkinson, *It's Official: Aftab Pureval Is Running For Steve Chabot's House Seat*, WVXU.org, Jan. 31, 2018 (available at: <http://www.wvxu.org/post/its-official-aftab-pureval-running-steve-chabots-house-seat#stream/0>).

⁶ Friends of Aftab Pureval, Ohio Campaign Finance Report for Hamilton County Clerk of Courts, filed Jul. 31, 2018 (attached as Exhibit A); Sharon Coolidge, *Aftab Pureval Spent \$30K From His Clerk Campaign Account This Year. Was Some For His Congressional Race?*, Cincinnati Enquirer, Aug. 2, 2018 (available at: <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/politics/2018/08/02/election-2018-aftab-purevals-running-congress-but-spending-clerk-campaign-too/878254002/>) (attached as Exhibit B); Sharon Coolidge, *Aftab Pureval on Controversial Poll: I'll 'Remedy Any Issues.'*, Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 26, 2018 (available at:

Pureval's clerk report also disclosed he spent \$28,380.78.⁷ One of the expenditures clearly appears to be for Pureval's federal race. On April 4, 2018, Pureval paid \$16,400 to GBA Strategies for "consulting."⁸ GBA Strategies is a polling firm based in Washington D.C., which Pureval had not previously used for his clerk race but had used for his for his congressional race in January 2018.⁹ When the clerk report was initially filed, the check to GBA Strategies had the memo line redacted, hiding the purpose of the expenditure.¹⁰ However, the memo line was later revealed to state "poll balance" and the payment was "unquestionably [for] a poll about [Pureval's] current congressional race."¹¹ The Cincinnati Enquirer obtained a copy of the poll, and reported,

The poll itself – which until now has been held secret by the Pureval campaign – undermines repeated claims by them that it was for both a future clerk of courts run and an exploration of a congressional run. The poll is headlined, "Polling in OH-1 shows opportunity for Aftab Pureval."

And there's not one question about the 2020 clerk of court's race.

...

The poll questions focused on whether the person would vote in the upcoming congressional race, asked several questions about Chabot, asked about the person's views on abortion and even asked a specific question about Chabot's paying his son-in-law to build his campaign website, the focus of a current attack ad against Chabot.

The poll mentions Pureval's time as clerk, but does not ask questions about the 2020 clerk's race.¹²

<https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/politics/2018/09/26/aftabs-secret-poll-obtained-enquirer/1430234002/>) (attached as Exhibit C).

⁷ Friends of Aftab Pureval, Ohio Campaign Finance Report for Hamilton County Clerk of Courts, filed Jul. 31, 2018 (attached as Exhibit A).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Sharon Coolidge, *Aftab Pureval Spent \$30K From His Clerk Campaign Account This Year. Was Some For His Congressional Race?*, Cincinnati Enquirer, Aug. 2, 2018.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*; Sharon Coolidge, *Aftab Pureval on Controversial Poll: I'll 'Remedy Any Issues.'*, Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 26, 2018.

¹² Sharon Coolidge, *Aftab Pureval on Controversial Poll: I'll 'Remedy Any Issues.'*, Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 26, 2018.

In addition to the expenditures' obvious purpose for the federal race, Pureval's actions also demonstrate an intent to violate federal campaign finance laws.¹³ When Pureval initially filed his clerk report, the memo lines on all four checks written during the reporting period were redacted.¹⁴ It was later revealed that three of the checks had nothing written in the memo line, but the check written to GBA Strategies stated "poll balance."¹⁵ Thus, it appears the redaction of all the checks was made for the purpose of hiding the expenditure to GBA Strategies for polling.¹⁶ Additionally, the Pureval campaign's explanation for the polling expenditure has changed from claiming all county campaign expenditures were not for the federal campaign,¹⁷ to the \$16,427 check was "used to pay for polling related to both" campaigns,¹⁸ to the poll was for both campaigns and both campaigns paid for it.¹⁹

Additionally, there were other expenditures from Pureval's clerk account that appear to be directly related to his federal campaign, including:

1. On February 5, 2018, Pureval paid \$360 to Mark Byron for media expenses. The payment was made five days after Pureval announced he was running for federal office. "Byron's photography website shows he photographed Pureval's Jan. 31 congressional race kick-off. There is no payment to Byron from the congressional campaign, records show."²⁰
2. On May 9, 2018, Pureval paid \$578 to Valentine Strategies, which is consulting on Pureval's congressional campaign according to his federal campaign finance

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *See id.*

¹⁷ Sharon Coolidge, *Aftab Pureval Spent \$30K From His Clerk Campaign Account This Year. Was Some For His Congressional Race?*, Cincinnati Enquirer, Aug. 2, 2018.

¹⁸ Paula Christian and Evan Millward, *Lawyer: Pureval Campaign Double-Dipped, Paid \$16k For Research Applying To Two Separate Races*, [WCPO Cleveland](#), Sept. 20, 2018.

¹⁹ Sharon Coolidge, *Aftab Pureval on Controversial Poll: I'll 'Remedy Any Issues.'*, Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 26, 2018.

²⁰ Sharon Coolidge, *Aftab Pureval Spent \$30K From His Clerk Campaign Account This Year. Was Some For His Congressional Race?*, Cincinnati Enquirer, Aug. 2, 2018.

- reports, for “supplies reimbursement.”²¹ Pureval’s clerk campaign had not made any payments to this vendor in 2017.²²
3. From January through June 2018, Pureval paid \$4,376.66 to NGP VAN for “software.” NGP VAN is a company that provides fundraising software, which is the “industry standard and used by nearly every Democratic congressional campaign. Pureval used the same company in the clerk’s race, but at a much lesser cost. Typically, the bigger the race, the larger the cost of the software.”²³ Pureval’s federal campaign did not disclose any payments to this vendor on his federal filings for this time period.²⁴
 4. In February and April, 2018, Pureval made two payments to Brianna Ledsome, who has worked for Pureval’s congressional campaign since January 2018. “Pureval’s most recent congressional campaign report does not show that any payments have been made to Ledsome from Pureval’s congressional campaign account.”²⁵

Analysis

Federal law prohibits federal candidates from soliciting, receiving, directing, transferring, or spending funds in connection with an election for Federal office unless the funds are subject to the limitations, prohibitions, and reporting requirements of the Act.²⁶ For instance, funds raised for a county race are not subject to federal contribution

²¹ *Id.*

²² Friends of Aftab Pureval, Ohio Campaign Finance Report for Hamilton County Clerk of Courts, filed Jan. 23, 2018.

²³ Sharon Coolidge, *Aftab Pureval Spent \$30K From His Clerk Campaign Account This Year. Was Some For His Congressional Race?*, Cincinnati Enquirer, Aug. 2, 2018.

²⁴ Aftab for Ohio, Federal Election Commission, accessed 9/27/2018).

²⁵ Sharon Coolidge, *Aftab Pureval Spent \$30K From His Clerk Campaign Account This Year. Was Some For His Congressional Race?*, Cincinnati Enquirer, Aug. 2, 2018; Aftab for Ohio, Federal Election Commission, accessed 9/27/2018).

²⁶ 52 U.S.C. § 30116; 11 C.F.R. § 300.63 (“If an individual is simultaneously running for both Federal and State or local office, the individual must raise, accept, and spend only Federal funds for the Federal election.”).

limitations²⁷ or federal reporting requirements for all contributions and expenditures,²⁸ and these “non-federal” funds cannot be used for a federal election.²⁹

Even in the case where a candidate is simultaneously running for federal and state office, the candidate may only solicit, receive, or spend non-federal funds if its (1) “solely in connection with such election for State or local office”; (2) “refers only” to him or her, to other candidates for that same state or local office, or both; and (3) is permitted under state law.³⁰ The candidate cannot use state funds for a federal election—the “individual must raise, accept, and spend only Federal funds for the Federal election.”³¹

In the present case, Pureval’s county clerk fund is not subject to the limitations, prohibitions, and reporting requirements of the Act. For instance, individual donations are not limited to \$2,700 and the federal reporting requirements do not apply. Yet, the facts surrounding Pureval’s use of his county clerk account demonstrates Pureval raised those funds to be used in his federal campaign. Pureval accepted \$30,000 in donations, the majority of the funds the clerk campaign raised during this reporting period, only after he announced his candidacy for federal office and from a single family member who also made the maximum donation to his federal race.

Moreover, the facts demonstrate Pureval used those funds for his federal race. First, Pureval was not up for re-election as clerk until 2020. Despite the years until the county election, Pureval quickly spent nearly all of the funds he raised on campaign expenses, all of which had direct ties to his federal campaign. The substance of the poll paid for by Pureval’s county fund demonstrates it was a federal campaign expense—the poll was entitled “Polling in OH-1 Shows Opportunity for Aftab Pureval,” asked questions about the opponent and issues in the federal race, and did not ask a single question about the county race nearly two years away. After accepting a large donation from his mother,

²⁷ For instance, a federal candidate is prohibited from accepting contributions from individuals in excess of \$2,700. 52 U.S.C. § 30116. However, that prohibition does not apply to funds raised for county races in Ohio, and use of the county funds would circumvent the limitations.

²⁸ 52 U.S.C. § 30104.

²⁹ 52 U.S.C. §§ 30116, 30118.

³⁰ 52 U.S.C. § 30125(e)(2); 11 C.F.R. § 300.63; Federal Election Advisory Opinion AO 2016-25 (Jan. 25, 2017).

³¹ 11 C.F.R. § 300.63.

Pureval spent it on polling for his congressional race, and any claim this was for his 2020 county race simply defies common sense and is ridiculous.

Moreover, the attempt to hide the polling expenditure demonstrates guilt. As part of its state filing, the Pureval campaign redacted the memo line of all four checks written by the campaign—three of the checks had nothing written in the memo line but the one paying for the poll stated “poll balance.” The redaction of all the checks was clearly an attempt to hide which check Pureval was attempting to alter and hide the purpose of the polling expenditure. Finally, Pureval’s campaign has been inconsistent in its explanation of the poll’s purpose or payment.

Yet, the poll is not the only county clerk expenditure that has direct ties to the federal campaign. For instance, clerk fund was used to pay a vendor that photographed Pureval’s congressional announcement—an expense related to the congressional campaign announcement must be paid for by federal funds and disclosed on federal reports.³² There was an increase in spending on fundraising software and payment to a consultant for Pureval’s federal campaign—all from a county account for an election that will not happen until 2020.

III. Conclusion

The facts surrounding Pureval’s use of his non-federal account clearly indicate he has accepted donations and made expenditures for his federal campaign with non-federal funds. This is not a case of a single expenditure being mischaracterized. Rather it appears Pureval used his non-federal account to accept donations from a family member who also made the maximum donation for his federal campaign, and immediately used those funds for his federal campaign. The attempts to obscure and explain only demonstrate intent to violation the law. If the Commission does not act and punish such a clear violation, then the laws are without purpose. FACT respectfully requests the Commission immediately investigate and hold the Respondents accountable.

³² On February 1, 2018, Friends of Aftab Pureval (County Clerk Committee) made an in-kind donation of \$980 to (Congressional Campaign) for “digital assets.” It is unclear whether this is related to the Clerk Committee paying for photographs of the Congressional Campaign announcement, although it does not matter legally. In either case, the payment for the photographs of a congressional campaign should have been paid for by federal funds and disclosed on the federal report.

Respectfully submitted,



Kendra Arnold, Executive Director
Foundation for Accountability & Civic Trust
1717 K Street NW, Suite 900
Washington, D.C. 20006



HAMILTON COUNTY
BOARD OF ELECTIONS

2018 JUL 31 PM 3:33

Committee Name Friends of Aftab Pureval		Office Sought Hamilton County Clerk of Courts		District
Street Address 580 Walnut Street, Apt. 1302		City Cincinnati	State OH	Zip 45202
Candidate Name OR PAC Registration Number Aftab Pureval		Treasurer Name Evan Nolan		Election Date (MM/DD/YYYY) 11/06/2016
Type of Report (choose one): <input type="checkbox"/> Annual <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Semiannual <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Primary <input type="checkbox"/> Post-Primary <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-General <input type="checkbox"/> Post-General Statewide Candidates Only: <input type="checkbox"/> July Monthly <input type="checkbox"/> August Monthly <input type="checkbox"/> September Monthly				
Amended Report <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		Termination <input type="checkbox"/> Check this box if the committee wishes to terminate with this report		Short Form Report (R.C. 3517.10(H)) <input type="checkbox"/> Check this box if the committee is filing a short term report. See attached instructions.

Year 2018

1. Amount brought forward from last report	10691.69
2. Total monetary contributions (From Forms 31-A and 31-E)	31320.00
3. Total other income (From Form 31-A-2)	0.00
4. Total funds available (sum of lines 1, 2, 3)	42011.69
5. Total monetary expenditures (From Forms 31-B and 31-F)	28380.78
6. Balance on hand (line 4 minus line 5)	13630.91
7. Value of in-kind contributions received (From Form 31-J-1)	
8. Value of in-kind contributions made (From Form 31-J-2)	
9. Outstanding loans owed by committee (From Form 31-C)	
10. Outstanding debts owed by committee (From Form 31-N)	
11. Outstanding loans owed to committee (From Form 31-K)	
12. Value of independent expenditures made (From Form 31-U)	

**THIS STATEMENT IS MADE UNDER PENALTY OF ELECTION FALSIFICATION.
WHOEVER COMMITS ELECTION FALSIFICATION IS GUILTY OF A FELONY OF THE FIFTH DEGREE.**

Evan Nolan

Signature of Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer

07/31/2018

Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Contribution Pages
1

Expenditure Pages
1

Other Pages
1

Total Pages
3

R.C. 3517.10

Name of Committee: Friends of Aftab Pureval

Name	Address	City	ST	Zip	Occupation	Employer	Reg. # If	Date	Amount	Form
Janet Allen-Reid	1824 Elm St	Cincinnati	OH	45202	Retired	Not Employed		01/23/2018	\$50.00	Debit
Janet Campbell	345 E. 7th Street	Cincinnati	OH	45202	Retired	Not Employed		01/24/2018	\$100.00	Debit
Meredith Roblyer	3600 Cachepit Way	Cincinnati	OH	45227	Not Employed	Not Employed		01/29/2018	\$150.00	Debit
Charles Kamine	8450 Arborcrest Dr.	Cincinnati	OH	45236	Attorney	Kamine & Schilling LLC		01/30/2018	\$100.00	Check
Graydon Good Government Committee	553 Lassing Way	Walton	KY	41094				01/30/2018	\$600.00	Check
Jane Doster	4265 Westminister Way	Mason	OH	45040	Retired	Not Employed		01/31/2018	\$50.00	Debit
Drenko Pureval	13 Medalist Way	Xenia	OH	45385	Retired	Not Employed		02/01/2018	\$15,000.00	Check
Peter St. John	1382 Burdett Ave	Cincinnati	OH	45206	Not Employed	Not Employed		02/02/2018	\$20.00	Debit
Susan Black	5700 Drake Road	Cincinnati	OH	45243	Retired	Not Employed		02/06/2018	\$250.00	Debit
Drenko Pureval	13 Medalist Way	Xenia	OH	45385	Retired	Not Employed		04/11/2018	\$15,000.00	Check
Page Total:									\$31,320.00	

R.C. 3517.10

Name of Committee: Friends of Aftab Pureval

To Whom Paid	Address	City	ST	ZIP	Date	Amount	Purpose	Method of Payment
NGP VAN	1445 New York Ave	Washington	DC	20005	01/02/2018	\$466.24	Fees	Debit
Dan Babou Cab	Best efforts				01/05/2018	\$38.00	Travel	Check #1060
Joe Levy	573 S Kellner Rd	Columbus	OH	43209	01/08/2018	\$2,884.00	Travel	Debit-Venmo
Hotwire	333 108th Ave. NE	Bellevue	WA	98004	01/29/2018	\$98.05	Travel	Debit
Panera	1 E. 6th Street	Cincinnati	OH	45202	01/29/2018	\$225.86	Food	Debit
Delta	1030 Delta Ave	Atlanta	GA	30354	01/29/2018	\$300.60	Travel	Debit
Sarah Topy	573 S Kellner Rd	Columbus	OH	43209	02/02/2018	\$412.00	Travel	Debit-Venmo
NGP VAN	1445 New York Ave	Washington	DC	20005	02/02/2018	\$775.00	Software	Debit
NGP VAN	1445 New York Ave	Washington	DC	20005	02/02/2018	\$18.05	Fees	Debit
Mark Byron	2100 W 8th Street	Cincinnati	OH	45202	02/05/2018	\$360.50	Media	Debit-Venmo
Uber	1455 Market Street	San Francisco	CA	94103	02/07/2018	\$9.00	Travel	Debit
Sarah Topy	573 S Kellner Rd	Columbus	OH	43209	02/20/2018	\$162.74	Tickets	Debit-Venmo
Human Rights Campaign	1640 Rhode Island Ave. N.W.	Washington	DC	20036	02/20/2018	\$579.00	Contribution	Debit
Brianna Ledsome	4013 Ivanhoe Avenue	Cincinnati	OH	45212	02/28/2018	\$206.00	Consulting	Debit-Venmo
NGP VAN	1445 New York Ave	Washington	DC	20005	03/02/2018	\$775.00	Software	Debit
NGP VAN	1445 New York Ave	Washington	DC	20005	03/02/2018	\$17.37	Fees	Debit
Wild Eggs	301 E. 4th Street	Cincinnati	OH	45202	03/16/2018	\$27.94	Food	Debit
Delta	1030 Delta Ave	Atlanta	GA	30354	03/19/2018	\$139.30	Travel	Debit
Eddie Davenport	3835 Hyde Park Avenue	Cincinnati	OH	45209	03/26/2018	\$43.26	Food	Debit-Venmo
CVS	2532 Main St	Bexley	OH	43209	04/02/2018	\$205.95	Supplies	Debit
NGP VAN	1445 New York Ave	Washington	DC	20005	04/02/2018	\$775.00	Software	Debit
Sarah Topy	573 S Kellner Rd	Columbus	OH	43209	04/03/2018	\$257.50	Reimbursements for dinner	Debit-Venmo
GBA Strategies	1701 K Street	Washington	DC	20008	04/04/2018	\$16,400.79	Consulting	Check #1061
Brianna Ledsome	4013 Ivanhoe Avenue	Cincinnati	OH	45212	04/04/2018	\$515.00	Consulting	Debit-Venmo
Cecil Thomas for Senate	545 E. Town Street	Columbus	OH	43215	04/30/2018	\$500.00	Contribution	Check #1064
NGP VAN	1445 New York Ave	Washington	DC	20005	05/02/2018	\$775.00	Software	Debit
Valentine Strategies	PO Box 6000	Cincinnati	OH	45206	05/09/2018	\$578.63	Supplies reimbursement	Check #1065
Ohio Ethics Commission	30 W. Spring Street	Columbus	OH	43215	05/15/2018	\$60.00	Fees	Debit
NGP VAN	1445 New York Ave	Washington	DC	20005	06/04/2018	\$775.00	Software	Debit
					Page Total:	\$28,380.78		

Aftab Pureval spent \$30K from his clerk campaign account this year. Was some for his congressional race?

[Sharon Coolidge](#) Updated 4:43 p.m. ET Aug. 3, 2018

Hamilton County Clerk of Courts Aftab Pureval has a campaign war chest of \$1.5 million as he pursues Ohio's 1st Congressional district seat.

But publicly available campaign finance reports appear to show Pureval used his clerk of courts campaign account for expenses in his federal congressional race.

And that's a campaign no-no. Using a county account in a federal race could be a violation of election laws, because the rules for each differ.

Pureval spent \$30,000 in the first six months of this year out of the clerk campaign account – even though a potential run for re-election wouldn't come for another two years when Pureval's term is up, according to a campaign finance reports filed Tuesday at the Hamilton County Board of Elections. Pureval was elected clerk in 2016.

On Feb. 5 – five days after Pureval announced he was running for Congress – the clerk's account cut a \$360 check to Mark Byron for media. Byron is a Cincinnati-based photographer who has previously worked for Pureval. Byron's photography website shows he photographed Pureval's Jan. 31 congressional race kick-off. There is no payment to Byron from the congressional campaign, records show.

View Bryon photography: <https://www.byronphoto.com/Aftab-Pureval-for-Congress/>

Pureval declined to comment. Pureval's congressional campaign manager Sarah Topy told The Enquirer all donations and expenses from the clerk campaign account are related to the clerk's office. She declined to comment on specific spending, including the photography expense and specific other expenses related to the congressional campaign.

Hours after The Enquirer's story was posted Thursday on Cincinnati.com, Brian G. Svoboda from Perkins Coie LLP in Washington, DC, and counsel for Aftab's campaign, sent a statement that said:

"The claim that Aftab Pureval engaged in any kind of 'campaign no-no,' as the Enquirer insinuated on its web site today, is unsupported by fact and law. Federal Election Commission rules expressly allow individuals to run campaigns for federal and local office at the same time. They also expressly allow individuals to raise funds for both their federal and local campaigns. Doing so has been a common practice for more than forty years, and the FEC has repeatedly allowed state and local campaigns to divide their costs appropriately. The FEC has repeatedly rejected allegations like those here. It has repeatedly declined to pursue claims that federal and local campaigns improperly allocated salary payments, polls, communications and other types of expenses. In one advisory opinion, the FEC even warned that paying a local officeholder expense out of a federal campaign would itself trigger a violation. These allegations would fail to meet the minimum threshold even for FEC administrative review."

Then Friday, Pureval filed an amended clerk of courts 2017 annual report with the Hamilton County Board of Elections. No corrections were made to this year's report, but the amended report shows Pureval – after this story

was published online – is doing a detailed accounting of his books.

On the original 2017 report, Pureval detailed contributions of \$8,000 for the first half of 2017. Now, he reported, he was given \$8,750 in that same time. While the difference is less than \$1,000, it shows there were contributions not accounted for.

His campaign did not return three requests for further comment Friday.

Democrat Pureval announced on Jan. 31 that he would challenge Republican Steve Chabot in Ohio's First Congressional District this November.

Here's what you need to know about Steve Chabot and Aftab Pureval in 30 seconds Wochit

After that, the clerk of courts campaign report shows two large donations from Pureval's mother, Drenko Pureval, and spending on travel, media and consulting from the clerk campaign account.

One day after the congressional announcement, according to his clerk's office campaign report, Drenko Pureval, donated \$15,000 to Pureval's clerk of courts campaign.

On the same day, she donated \$5,400 to Aftab for Ohio, Aftab's Congressional campaign account – the office her son is seeking this year, his federal campaign reports shows. That is the maximum amount permitted to be donated to the congressional campaign. There is no limit for donations in county races, including to the clerk campaign account.

Drenko Pureval then wrote a second \$15,000 check to her son's clerk of courts account on April 11, the clerk report says, bringing the total she donated to that campaign to \$30,000.

In the midst of those donations, on April 4, Pureval paid \$16,400 to Washington D.C.–based polling firm GBA Strategies for consulting, the clerk's campaign report said. GBA is a Democratic polling firm. Pureval had never before used the firm in the clerk's race. GBA did a congressional poll for Pureval in January, according to a polling memo distributed to supporters from the congressional campaign, which was obtained by The Enquirer.

More: [PX column: Aftab Pureval builds war chest as outside groups spend big money attacking Chabot](#)

More: [Who is Aftab Pureval? 5 things to know about Rep. Steve Chabot's new challenger in Ohio](#)

More: [Pureval has gained on Chabot in the minds of some experts. One sees race as a toss-up](#)

The clerk of courts campaign finance report covered donations and expenses between Jan. 1, 2018 and June 30, 2018. The report shows Pureval started the reporting period with \$10,691 in the clerk account. He raised \$31,320 – \$30,320 on the day of his congressional announcement and after the announcement. In that same time, he spent \$28,380.

Pureval has filed three campaign finance reports in the congressional race, reports in April, May and July. He raised roughly \$1.5 million.

Attorney Evan Nolan serves as treasurer for both Pureval campaigns. He declined to comment.

If Pureval did use the county account for his federal race, such use could violate federal and state campaign finance laws. Violations of federal and state campaign finance laws can carry criminal penalties, including jail time.

Peruvian's clerk campaign finance report shows multiple expenses for travel, consulting and other work.

A look at the Hamilton County Board of Elections report shows:

- Pureval paid NGP VAN, a company that provides fundraising software to Democrats, \$3,910. The software is the industry standard and used by nearly every Democratic congressional campaign. Pureval used the same company in the clerk's race, but at a much lesser cost. Typically, the bigger the race, the larger the cost of the software.
- Valentine Strategies, which is consulting on Pureval's congressional campaign according to his federal campaign finance reports, was paid \$578 on May 9. The money was reimbursement for supplies.
- Pureval's clerk account made multiple payments to Brianna Ledsome, who according to LinkedIn, currently works for Aftab for Ohio, the congressional campaign. Pureval's most recent congressional campaign report does not show that any payments have been made to Ledsome from Pureval's congressional campaign account."

Cody Rizzuto, a spokesman for Chabot, said, "Based on his finance reports, it couldn't be more clear that Aftab violated campaign finance laws. Aftab has a lot of explaining to do."

Topy countered, "There is no story here."

"All of these expenditures were appropriate and legal. Any insinuation otherwise is simply wrong," she said. "It shouldn't surprise anyone that Steve Chabot wants to try and change the subject because he doesn't want to run on his record so he's looking to stir up non-stories where there aren't any."

Aftab Pureval on controversial poll: I'll 'remedy any issues.'

[Sharon Coolidge](#) Updated 5:15 p.m. ET Sept. 26, 2018

Here's what you need to know about Steve Chabot and Aftab Pureval in 30 seconds Wochit

The Enquirer has obtained the poll at the center of a campaign finance spending complaint against Hamilton County Clerk of Courts Aftab Pureval – and it's unquestionably a poll about his current congressional race.

The poll itself – which until now has been held secret by the Pureval campaign – undermines repeated claims by them that it was for both a future clerk of courts run and an exploration of a congressional run. The poll is headlined, "Polling in OH-1 shows opportunity for Aftab Pureval."

And there's not one question about the 2020 clerk of court's race.

That's a problem because if the poll was for both races, the spending would be permissible under Ohio campaign finance laws. But spending from a clerk of courts campaign fund solely for the purpose of a congressional run would be a violation of those laws.

The spending must be kept separate because in the federal race, donations are capped at \$5,400. In the county race, there are no donation limits.

Pureval issued a statement Wednesday saying he conducted the poll to "test the waters" to determine whether to run for Congress or stay on as clerk of courts.

"After reviewing FEC guidance and regulations, we determined that to follow

both the letter and spirit of the law, we needed to pay for the poll out of both accounts. If that turns out not to be the case, we will immediately remedy any issues. This election should be about protecting health care, creating jobs, and improving the lives of others. That's what I'm focused on."

The final determination is up to the Ohio Elections Commission, which last week voted 6-1 to investigate Pureval's clerks of courts spending. If violations are found, potential fines for the failure to file accurate campaign finance reports can be \$15 to \$100 per day and the case could be referred to a prosecutor for criminal charges.

Two lawyers for Pureval's campaign held a press call Wednesday to respond to questions. They explained the poll was for both campaigns and the checks were written from both campaigns.

It's the first time a payment from the congressional campaign fund has come to light.

Pureval, a Democrat, was elected Hamilton County Clerk of Courts in 2016. He is running against Republican Steve Chabot for Ohio's 1st Congressional seat, a race that's being watched nationally.

The Enquirer obtained a copy of the poll, which was conducted by GBA Strategies from Jan. 11 to Jan. 16 and polled 400 likely voters.

The poll questions focused on whether the person would vote in the upcoming congressional race, asked several questions about Chabot, asked about the person's views on abortion and even asked a specific question about Chabot's paying his son-in-law to build his campaign website, the focus of a current attack ad against Chabot.

The poll mentions Pureval's time as clerk, but does not ask questions about

the 2020 clerk's race.

The Pureval campaign has twice insisted the poll was for both races, though the campaign refused to share its contents.

Pureval campaign manager Sarah Topy told the Enquirer in August, for the first spending story, "There is no story here."

"All of these expenditures were appropriate and legal. Any insinuation otherwise is simply wrong," she said. "It shouldn't surprise anyone that Steve Chabot wants to try and change the subject because he doesn't want to run on his record so he's looking to stir up non-stories where there aren't any."

Pureval campaign attorney Peter O'Shea told a group of reporters last week the money was for polling for both the clerk's race and congressional race. "Polling can be done for both races, and there's no law that prohibits from running for two offices at the same time."

More: [Aftab Pureval spent \\$30K from his clerk campaign account this year. Was some for his congressional race?](#)

More: [Aftab Pureval's clerk campaign broke spending rules, Ohio election complaint charges](#)

More: [Ohio Elections Commission votes to probe Aftab Pureval campaign expenses](#)

The spending has taken center stage in the race, prompting a drama-filled Hamilton County Board of Elections investigation into document redactions and an Ohio Elections complaint, which is going forward.

It all stems from Pureval's 2018 semi-annual campaign finance reports, in which he spent \$30,000 – a lot of money for a clerk's race that is two years

away. The Enquirer outlined questionable spending about travel, media and a \$16,400 expense paid to GBA Strategies for consulting. The firm is known for conducting congressional polls.

After the Enquirer story was published, Brian Shrive, an attorney for the Ohio Coalition Opposed to Spending and Taxes filed a complaint related to the spending with the Ohio Elections Commission.

At first, it was impossible to determine what the GBA spending was for because the memo line in checks related to expenses, including that one, were redacted.

That became its own drama at the Board of Elections about who did the redacting. Hamilton County Board of Elections Deputy Director Sally Krisel admitted she made the redactions at the request of Sarah Topy, Pureval's campaign manager. Krisel apologized for how she handled the matter.

In all, there were four checks, with four redactions. But after Krisel's admission, the Pureval campaign released unredacted checks showing the GBA expense was for "poll balance." The other memos lines were blank under the redactions.