

WHAT DID THE TROOPERGATE INVESTIGATOR MEAN WHEN HE SAID “FINANCIAL INCENTIVE”?

There's a potential bombshell hidden at the end of USAT's story on the subpoenas about to be issued in TrooperGate:

Branchflower said he needed subpoenas to interview several Palin aides who had been in meetings about the matter. And in one case, he said, he needed to compel the interview of a state contractor whom he said may have lied to him.

Murlene Wilkes owns Harbor Adjusting Services in Anchorage, which has a contract with the state to process workers' compensation claims, Branchflower said. She told him the governor's office did not pressure her to deny a claim for Wooten, he said. But in August, one of her employees called a tip line and claimed there indeed was such pressure, Branchflower said.

"I remember at some point in the conversation she had mentioned or said something to the effect that either the governor or the governor's office wanted this claim denied," Branchflower quoted the tipster as saying. "I don't care if it's the president who wants this claim denied, I'm not going to deny it unless I have the medical evidence to do that."

Wilkes may have had a financial incentive to cover up, Branchflower said. Wilkes did not respond to a

voicemail left at her office Friday
afternoon. [my emphasis]

As a reminder, when Frank Bailey called State Trooper Lieutenant Rodney Dial in February to pressure him about Wooten, Bailey mentioned "funny business" about a workers comp claim Wooten had submitted—basically that days after Wooten submitted the workers comp claim, he was caught on a snowmobile. Bailey also suggests that Wooten may have hid a pre-existing injury on his Trooper application.

It sounds like someone from the Governor's office called the workers comp contractor, Murlene Wilkes, gave her this information, and pushed her to deny the coverage on that basis. Wilkes refused to deny the claim. But when Wilkes spoke with Branchflower, she said the Governor's office had not pressured her.
[Update: Andrew Halcro has some on this.]

And Branchflower says, "Wilkes may have had a financial incentive to cover up." Sure, it may just be that Wilkes didn't want to lose the contract with the state, and so didn't admit the pressure to Branchflower. Branchflower may just mean that Wilkes decided, on her own, not to piss off Sarah Palin.

But it sure makes you wonder whether someone made the threat of losing the contract explicit.