

OHASHI ALLEGEDLY ACCEPTED MONEY, FLIGHTS, VACATIONS AND MORE

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accepted bribes and kickbacks, improperly helped outside companies obtain contracts with the region and aided them in submitting fraudulent invoices.

The forensic accountants found dozens of occasions where Ohashi allegedly accepted money, flights, vacations, hotel rooms, tickets, electronics, home renovations, "adult entertainment" and even Viagra.

The shocking details in the report raise serious questions about Halton Region's oversight of contracts, invoices and payments, as well as its oversight of the behaviour of some companies that provide services and equipment to the region in the water and wastewater division.

Two of the companies identified in the report alleged to have provided kick-

backs to Ohashi are still on Halton Region's most recently published list of approved suppliers of equipment and services for the water and wastewater division.

In written responses to The Spectator's questions, Halton Region stated it "is committed to the highest standards of corporate accountability, transparency, responsibility and integrity."

"These are the actions of individuals in positions of trust who chose to use the knowledge of the controls and systems to defraud Halton residents and Halton Region," stated Stacey Hunter, spokesperson for the region.

"Their actions in no way represent the 2,500 skilled, hardworking and dedicated individuals who serve Halton residents each and every day."

"Halton Region has rig-

orous systems, policies and procedures in place to safeguard assets and protect the public interest," Hunter stated. "Even the most controlled system cannot prevent illicit activity, particularly when internal and external collusion is involved."

In 2016, Ohashi was charged with seven counts including municipal corruption, accepting secret commissions, fraud and criminal breach of contract.

While some of the details of Ohashi's actions became public when he was charged, the forensic accountants' report provides a comprehensive analysis of the scope of the allegedly fraudulent behaviour which appears to have gone on for more than a decade.

Ohashi was found guilty by a jury on June 21 of fraud over \$5,000, fraud under \$5,000, and uttering a forged document. He is scheduled

to be sentenced on Feb. 28.

Also facing charges with Ohashi was Stoney Creek resident David Norris, principal of Sirron Systems Inc., a company that was a vendor and service provider to Halton Region.

Norris was charged with five counts and convicted by a jury on June 21 of fraud over \$5,000, municipal corruption, and accepting secret commissions. He will also be sentenced on Feb. 28.

Ohashi and Norris attempted to have their convictions stayed earlier this fall by launching a challenge under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that argued their rights were violated by the Crown, but they abandoned their application on Nov. 28.

Attempts to reach Ohashi and Norris for comment were unsuccessful.

Following Ohashi's arrest in 2016, Halton police investigated and charged an-

other region employee, Nicolas Rewa, who was subsequently found guilty of defrauding the region of about \$770,000 through falsely awarding service contracts to Sirron Systems Inc.

Rewa was sentenced to three years in jail.

The forensic accounting firm prepared the investigative report based on emails, phone call logs, texts, BlackBerry Messenger messages, a computer hard drive analysis, and reviews of Halton Region invoices and contracts.

The investigators also received documents from the ex-spouse of Norris, who also happened to be a former bookkeeper of Sirron Systems, one of the companies implicated in the scheme.

Sirron Systems performed electrical, instrumentation and data acquisition services for Halton Region from 1995 to 2017.

According to the confidential report, Sirron Systems issued nearly 16,000 invoices totalling \$30.5 million to Halton over the 22-year period.

When the forensic accountants interviewed Norris' ex-spouse, she told them Sirron began submitting fictitious invoices to Halton Region around 2003. She told them she was terminated in February 2014 "as a result of her reluctance to participate in Sirron's 'questionable billing practices,'" the report states.

The forensic accountants compared Sirron bookkeeping spreadsheets with Halton Region invoices and calculated that Sirron's allegedly fictitious invoices to Halton totalled between \$12.3 million to \$13.9 million.

At least 38 of the allegedly fictitious invoices totalling \$490,000 were directly attributable to Ohashi, the report states.

At one point, Halton Region issued payments of

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