

LOCAL

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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 nearly \$500,000 in total of Sirron invoices to the Receiver General of Canada because the Canada Reve-

nue Agency had obtained a garnishment order against the company.

The report found evidence Norris provided kickbacks to Ohashi that allegedly included cash payments of \$41,000 and \$11,200 (U.S.), as well as travel, electronics and tickets.

According to a text message exchange in April 2011, Norris allegedly hid part of one kickback payment in a washroom stall. "When u get here use washroom -- \$\$ are under toilette paper roll on top of garbage can," Norris texted Ohashi.

On other occasions, according to the report, payments were allegedly mailed directly to Ohashi's home.

Included in the report are several instances where Ohashi allegedly manipulated the tendering process to the advantage of a hand-picked company or helped alter the terms of a contract to provide benefits to a company.

For example, the report suggests Ohashi succeeded in having certain minimum requirements added to the tender for the provision of ozone equipment for the Burloak Water Purification Plant, which disqualified competitors to the company he wanted to obtain the contract.

The report shows the main company that ended up providing the ozone equipment and a second smaller company hired to service the equipment were both represented by

the same person, a New Jersey man whose listed business address appears to be his home.

The report also alleges there were instances when the New Jersey man provided kickbacks to Ohashi.

Ironically, the report points out, there was no need for a service contract for the ozone equipment because the company that supplied it was supposed to maintain and repair its own equipment.

In text messages from 2012 with a Halton Region co-op student, Ohashi told her how the New Jersey company rep would fly to Buffalo and stay in Niagara Falls.

"I meet him Friday nights ... then ... And then golf Saturday mornings before he flies back," Ohashi texted.

"Ah man, u got me confessing too many secrets... you have (too) much blackmail material now."

When the forensic accountants looked into details of the service invoices from the New Jersey companies for the ozone equipment, they found evidence of suspicious activity.

Each water plant is required to maintain an operations log that notes the presence of external suppliers and contractors.

On 24 occasions between 2005 and 2010, Halton was billed a total of \$248,000 (U.S.) for service calls but there is no record that anyone from the New Jersey companies actually visited the water purification plants based on the logs.

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