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BUDDY GUY, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

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Jeffco plaintiffs' law team is formidable as job-tax suit proves

Monday, September 14, 2009

BARNETT WRIGHT

News staff writer

One is described as the brains of the team while the other is described as the brawn.

One usually develops the legal theory and the other crafts the legal documents.

Jim McFerrin and Sam Hill, lawyers for Jefferson County taxpayers who emerged victorious in the occupational-tax lawsuit, are formidable individually, but can be overwhelming as a team, friends say.

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The two took on the county and a complex occupational tax that had been challenged more than 17 times since 1988.

Friends and colleagues say their intellect and drive won the case, which could result in a refund of as much as \$37 million for taxpayers.

McFerrin and Hill said the case put a spotlight on how county government functions.

"And that spotlight has not been very complimentary," McFerrin said. "The way our county government is structured, it's dysfunctional. ... We have seen that the government of Jefferson County has been a nightmare waiting to happen."

County officials contend the occupational-tax lawsuit was filed to make money for the attorneys. "This is about them getting paid," Commission President Bettye Fine Collins has said.

McFerrin and Hill - who stand to make \$8 million to \$10 million from the case - maintain it wasn't about money, but the law.

"This case started out with one small issue," Hill said. "Was the tax repealed ... ? We didn't start off with the attitude of shaking up the county government. We started off with attitude of 'let's get rid of an unconstitutional, illegal tax.'"

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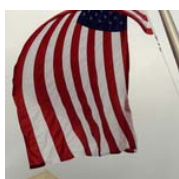
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