



NEWS

# ANTIOCH COP, CALLING HIS FIRING POLITICALLY MOTIVATED, TO APPEAL

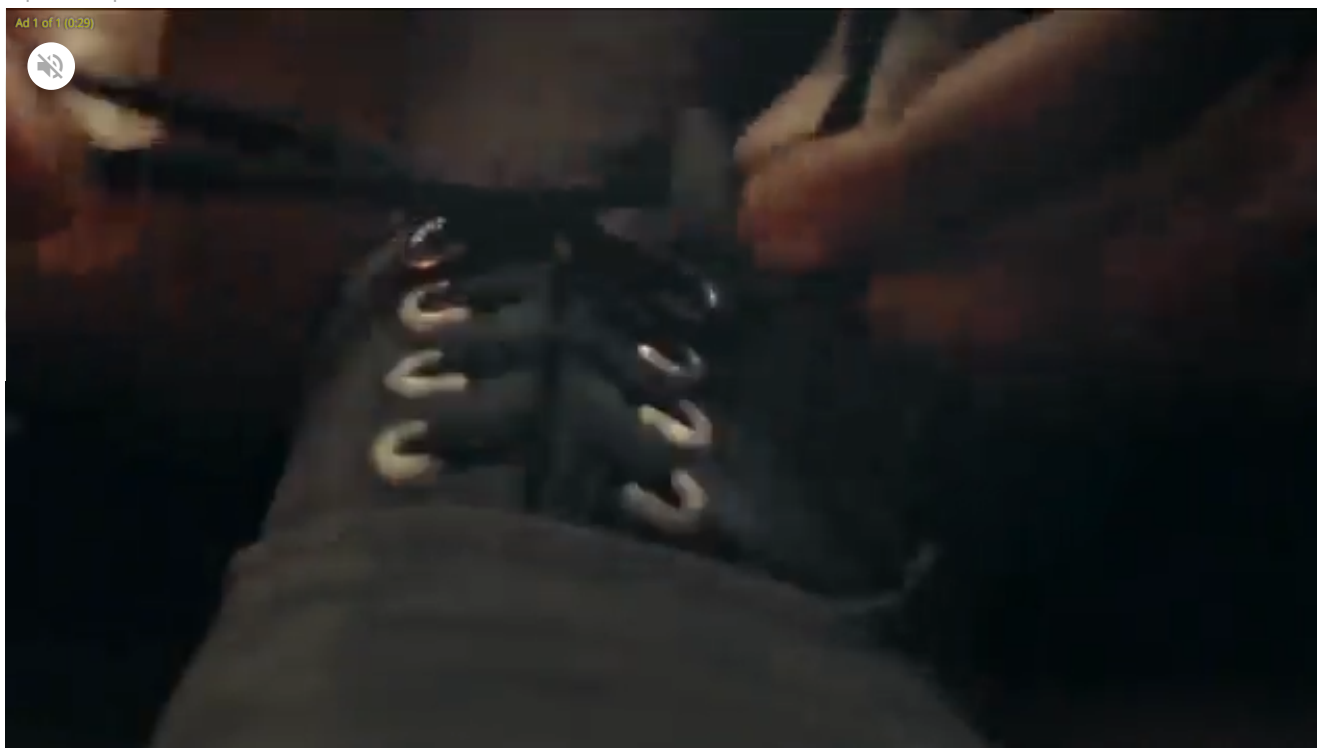
By Roger W. Rouland  
Chicago Tribune • Apr 16, 1991 at 12:00 am



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Fired Antioch Police Officer Michael Culat, found guilty of infractions allegedly documented on a hidden Police Department video camera, plans to appeal the decision.

The Antioch Police and Fire Commission agreed April 1 to terminate Culat after two days of hearings during which the commission viewed videotape of Culat kissing and hugging a female dispatcher.

AD



But Culat believes he was a victim of political infighting and was targeted for termination by Chief Charles Miller, who asked state police to hide a pencil-size video camera in the Antioch police station.

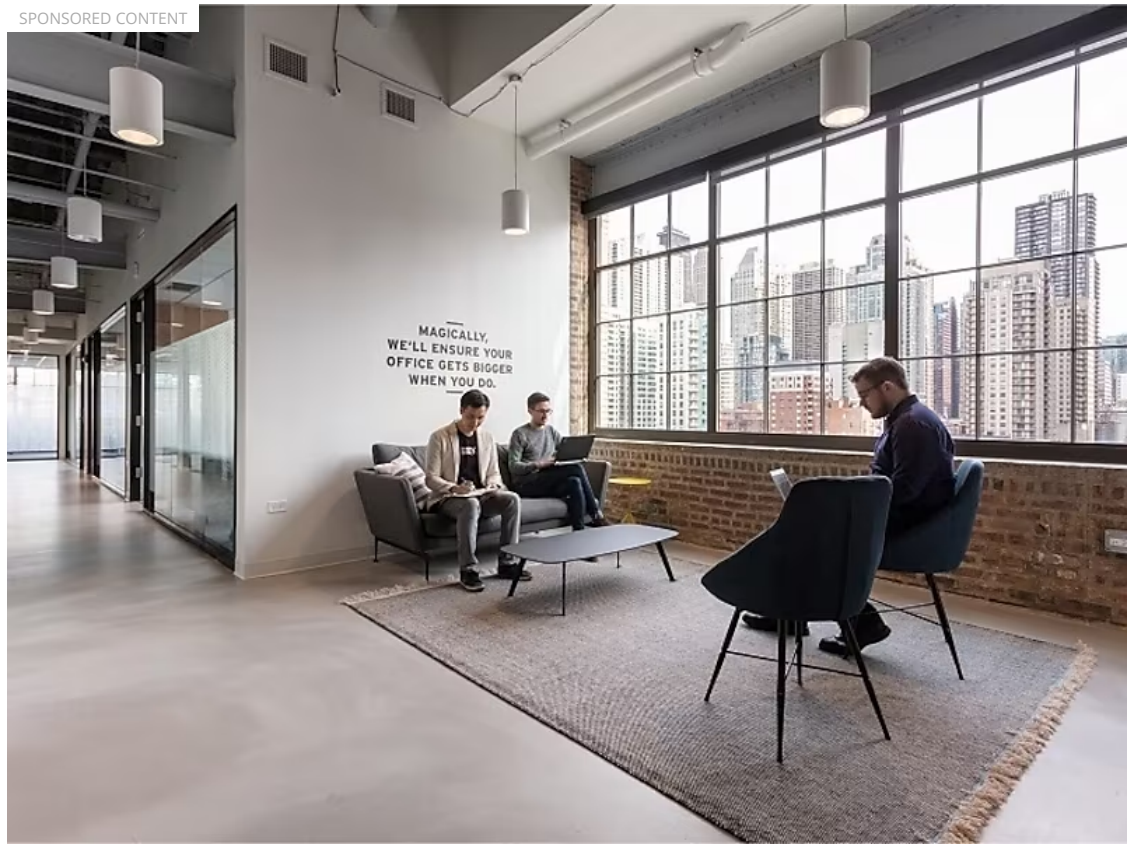
"It was selective enforcement, and it was politically motivated," said Bruce Brandwein, Culat`s attorney. Brandwein said he will appeal the decision in Lake County Circuit Court.

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By IWG

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The commission found Culat guilty of kissing and hugging dispatcher Susan Nitschneider, who was seven months` pregnant, while on duty. It also ruled that Culat was involved in an inappropriate conversation about stolen property, removed correspondence from senior officers` mailboxes and failed to inform Miller about details of a liquor store sting.

Culat testified that his encounter with the woman was not sexual. He said she was trying to encourage him not to quit because of a previous disciplinary reprimand. Culat also said that neck and shoulder massages he gave Nitschneider were to ease back cramps she was having as a result of her pregnancy.

"He and the radio dispatcher kissed and hugged a couple of times, but there are no rules and regulations that said he could not hug a radio operator," Brandwein said.

Culat also admitted that he removed correspondence from other mail slots, including Miller`s, but said other officers do the same thing.

The officer denied charges that he failed to keep Miller informed about the use of a youth for a sting operation on a liquor store that was allegedly selling to minors and that he inappropriately advised an anonymous caller about whether stolen property could be traced.

Brandwein said the charges stem from a political feud between Miller and Mayor Robert Wilton, who had tried to remove Miller from a leading role in the department.

"(Culat) supported the mayor," Brandwein said. "The mayor wanted to remove the police chief, and basically it was payback time."

Miller denied any political motivation and declined to comment on the video camera investigation. He did say that charges justified termination.

Miller has also asked that Nitschneider be terminated for her interaction with Culat and for allegedly removing and photocopying others` mail. No date for the dispatcher`s hearing has been set. She also will be represented by Brandwein.

Late last month, in another disciplinary case brought by Miller, attorneys for the chief and Lt. Tom Fisher reached an agreement that gave Fisher a three-day suspension after he admitted he had told Nitschneider to disobey an interdepartmental memo.

Fisher, second in command in the department, had also been charged with inappropriate removal of correspondence from mailboxes and allegedly planning with Culat to use a minor for the liquor store sting without permission.

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