



## The Voice of Ethics Podcast Transcript

### March 2026 Episode

### Et Tu, Vendor?

Susan: Hello ethical people, I'm Susan Willeke of the Ohio Ethics Commission, welcoming you to The Voice of Ethics, the podcast where we dive into stories about ethics in government. Today's episode is debuting on the day after the infamous Ides of March, a day made infamous by William Shakespeare's tragedy Julius Caesar. And although the soothsayer in that play warned us all to "beware the Ides of March," if you are listening to this podcast any time on March 16<sup>th</sup> or afterwards, I think you're pretty safe. And actually that line – "Beware the Ides of March" - is by no means the only oft quoted verse from Julius Caesar. Here's a quote from Act One, Scene Two, where Cassius tries to convince Brutus that people have the power to control their own destiny, and that our fate is not determined by the stars.

Cassius: Men at some time are masters of their fates. The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings.

Susan: So it seems appropriate that on this day after the Ides of March, we dive into a story about the stars. How can there possibly be an Ethics Law story tied to the stars above? Glad you asked. Grab your telescope and a comfy chair, because we have a story about the stars that would have made the Bard himself proud. Enjoy!

Susan: As promised, I want to introduce you all to kind of my counterpart for the city of Columbus. Andria Williams and I have known each other for, gosh, at least ten years now Andria, wouldn't you say?

Andria: Yeah, yeah, at least. It could be more, plus or minus.

Susan: Yeah. Andria is the Learning Solutions Architect for the city of Columbus. She is the brains and the brawn and the brilliance behind all kinds of training for the city of Columbus, which is a large employer. Andria, eight, 9,000 city employees now in Columbus, something like that?

Andria: Yeah, during the summer months, probably 10,000 plus.

Susan: So you can tell, everybody, Andria has a wonderful job, a big job, and she does it well. So Andria and I have worked together over the years on a lot of different training opportunities, and I've just grown to be one of her biggest fans. And one day I heard this story from somebody else in the city of Columbus. It's one of those, you're like, "No! This wouldn't really happen." And not only did it happen, but it was just last year that Andria said to me, "Well, Susan, you know whose story that was? It was mine!" So I said, "Andria, I have to have you on the podcast!" So with that, everybody: this is Andria. I'm so glad to have her. Thank you for joining us today, Andria on the podcast.

Andria: It's a pleasure to be here. I'm excited to hang with you and talk ethics!

Susan: Talk ethics, who doesn't love to talk ethics, right?

Andria: Yeah!

Susan: So here's the thing. Just a little bit of set up. Andria, you didn't get offered a trip to Paris. You didn't get offered a tin of cookies. You didn't get offered a ticket to an OSU football game or a golf outing, all the

normal stuff that we all think about. You got offered something fairly unique, so can I give you the floor and tell us a little bit of the story?

Andria: Absolutely. This particular vendor over the years has tried to give us things that were really just unacceptable. And I would say, "Nope, can't take that!" Or I would have the conversation with them about, "Well, how much is that? And can I pay for it separately?" Right?

Susan: Absolutely.

Andria: And I had just really just said "No, I can't really accept that or I can't accept it on the on behalf of the city." And, last year, they had reached out via email, had said, "Hey, we have a gift coming your way, would you be able to make sure that it gets to you?" I was thinking, like, it was just going to be some cookies.

Susan: Right? A banana bread.

Andria: Yeah! And then the package arrived and it was kind of thin and skinny. There's a folder, and on the front of the folder it said "Star Registration." I was like, what? Wait wait wait wait, what!?!?

Susan: Well, you are a star, Andria. You are a star of training. You are.

Andria: Listen, I receive that. Thank you. \*both laugh\* As I go further into this folder, I quickly realize that a star has been purchased in my name. So there, I was like, "There's a star that's called Andria Williams!? What?!?" \*both laugh\* And I could not believe it. And then, after the surprise of this, the panic then set in. Because I was like, this is not a tin of cookies. This is not banana bread that I could share with my colleagues. It has my name only on it. Through the panic I then went into research mode about, well, can I change the star name? What does this really mean? How much did they pay for it?

Susan: Right.

Andria: You know, all of that stuff went into consideration. I'm actually quite still in shock that there was a star in my name.

Susan: So when you went into research mode, how much of that was you digging deep versus you guys actually consulted with your legal counsel with the city, etc.?

Andria: I did a little bit of researching to see if I could change the name before I talked to our Chief Ethics Officer. And so in talking with her, I said, "Hey, listen, I think this is a really interesting legal case," because, you know, the whole: who owns space?

Susan: Right?

Andria: So as I'm researching what I've come to understand is that all of these organizations sell stars! But you don't really own the star.

Susan: What if your star was also, had another name out there? How do you make sure that it's not the same star? Right?

Andria: Right! And I was like, this is just such an interesting thing to encounter. I kind of applauded the organization for finding an area that was uncharted.

Susan: Literally! Uncharted! The next frontier, right?

Andria: Exactly, exactly. So as I'm telling this story, with our Chief Ethics Officer about, like, all of this, I have to say, she got excited. She's like, "Wait, what? I've never heard of this!" My conversation with her prompted her to reach out to the Ohio Ethics Commission.

Susan: Uh huh.

Andria: Yeah, I had to call in the big dogs to see how I was going to handle it.

Susan: That's, that's our other official title, the Ethics Commission, the big dogs. Right? So yeah.

Andria: The big dogs \*laughs\*

Susan: So something like this is, it was, as you said, kind of unprecedented because to be fair, if somebody had said "Andria, I'm giving you a ticket to," I know you have roots to Cleveland, "I'm giving you a ticket to a Cleveland Browns game or a Guardians game." That's fairly easy to know what it's worth monetarily, it's printed somewhere on a ticket, it's on their website.

Andria: Yeah

Susan: This was kind of nebulous.

Andria: Yeah, just this uncharted territory, and you use the word nebulous, which I'm pretty sure that's a stargazing term itself!

Susan: It's a celestial term, I, thank you for picking up on that! I'm really proud of that pun.

Andria: Congratulations!

Susan: Thank you

Andria: I know, like, oh my gosh. Bravo, bravo. Honestly, I was really excited to know that I could contribute to all of the ethics attorneys everywhere and that maybe that this particular case would garner some attention in the next opinion and be located somewhere. I don't know.

Susan: You own your own little piece of ethics law history now, Andria.

Andria: \*sigh\* Yeah that's exciting.

Susan: \*laughs\* So what happened? How did this all get resolved? What was the outcome?

Andria: Well, the Chief Ethics Officer got back to me and she said, "Well, can they change the name?" And I said, "Well, let me see what I could do." And basically the answer to that is no, the name cannot be changed. Basically the resolution is like, I cannot accept the gift. That's it. And,

Susan: Yeah.

Andria: Um, at the end of the day, when you have these cases, you have to bring in other parties. If you have a little inkling, you know, of a "Spidey-sense,"

Susan: Yes! Yes! Yes!

Andria: if you have a Spidey-sense that somebody is going to feel weird about what you've got just call your Chief Ethics Officer, call the Ohio Ethics Commission and get an understanding of what the next steps are that you should take.

Susan: Well I couldn't have said it better myself! Thank you. Andria, I'm glad to know that you have found our office to be a good resource. So everybody, the next time there is a star filled night, I want you to look

up and pick out which one that, for one shining moment, was named after our own beloved Andria Williams from the City of Columbus.

Andria: Yeah. Yeah, yeah yep. And then right after that, just go buy yourself a star. \*laughs\*

Susan: Amen! I like that great conclusion! Andria as always, you are a delight. I love spending time with you, whether it's in person or virtually. Thank you for being here today!

Andria: You're so welcome! Looking forward to more great stories from the Ohio Ethics Commission.

Susan: Isn't that a great story? And just so you know, the original conversation Andrea and I recorded was actually longer and filled with even more laughter and general merriment. We had so much fun recording this episode that we even occasionally got off track a bit. I guess you could say we were spacing out. \*space sound effect\* Stars? Space? Get it!? I just had to get that joke in there, sorry.

But seriously, if I'm being completely honest, the Ohio Ethics Commission does not have an explicit Advisory Opinion about what to do in case a vendor spends a bunch of money naming a star after you. I mean, why would we? Who would have ever dreamed this could become a reality? This is just such a funny story to me.

The good news is, Andrea did exactly the right thing and precisely what we advise people to do when confronted with an unprecedented situation. She reached out to her agency's legal counsel, who in turn reached out to our office. Conversations took place and resolutions were determined to protect both the public servant at the center of this story, Andrea, and to safeguard the public in that agency's work and efforts.

So well done, Andrea. In your honor, I think we need one more quote from Shakespeare's play, Julius Caesar, where Brutus confronts Cassius, who has accepted bribes.

Brutus: I had rather coin my heart and drop my blood for drachmas than to wring from the hard hands of peasants their vile trash. By any indirection.

Susan: I think Andrea has some characteristics in common with Brutus, who also resisted government corruption, even when a situation easily presented itself to perhaps not do the right thing. So the next time you are outdoors on a beautiful starlit night, take a look up into the heavens and know there is a star out there named - not after Andrea - but rather, the training department of the City of Columbus. A happy ending for all. Well, maybe not for Julius Caesar, I grant you, but nonetheless, a happy ending for this episode of The Voice of Ethics.

And to conclude this celestial episode, I pose to you this intergalactic question: why do so few NASA employees get married? Because they need their space. I love that one. Take care everybody. Be ethical. Bye.