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Ex-wife: Former legislator owes child support

Couple's custody battle made headline in 1980s when Paul Hess took kids to Egypt

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By Andy Marso

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A Berryton woman says a former Kansas state legislator who now lives in Washington owes her "hundreds of thousands of dollars" in unpaid child support for their three sons.

Anne Schroer's ex-husband, Paul R. Hess, was a rising political star and chairman of the Senate Ways and Means committee in the 1980s. But he really made headlines when he took his sons and fled to Egypt in 1985 while facing theft charges and a custody battle with Schroer.

The couple's three sons are now 31, 30 and 28, but Schroer says Hess still owes her for years of providing for the children on her own after they divorced.

"It's called back child support plus interest," Schroer said. "Nobody seems to want to do anything and it's just ridiculous."

Hess was reached by phone Monday in the offices of the King County Republican Party's 46th District, of which he serves as chairman.

"I just don't have any comment," Hess said. "This has been a long, ongoing thing over 25 years, and I just don't want to comment on it."

Schroer's child support proceedings moved from Miami County to Shawnee County in 1990, after she married Topeka attorney Gene Schroer.

Shawnee County court records show that it has been passed from one court division to another three times since August 2008, but there has been no other movement on it during that time.

"It's routine to re-assign cases to a new division for a variety of reasons," Hess' attorney, Patrick Barnes, said.

Barnes said he believes the child support judgments are dead.

"Our contention is that the judgments on it were dormant long ago and are unenforceable at this point, whatever they may be," Barnes said.

The Department of Children and Families is the state agency that has authority to collect child support. Department spokeswoman Angela de Rocha said she could not comment on specific cases, but the case file shows that the agency terminated Schroer's case in 2004.

After reviewing the case file, Lenexa family law attorney Ron Nelson said Schroer appears to have filed the necessary "revivors" to keep at least a portion of her child support judgments alive.

"Just from a review of those revivors, whatever was revived is good and valid and collectable," Nelson said. "DCF, it may not be a priority for them, but I think it's still something they can

collect. A lot of attorneys out there would take it on a contingent basis."

Nelson said responsibility for prosecuting Hess for non-support would lie with the U.S. Attorney's Office. He also said it's not technically "back child support" Schroer is looking for, but rather she's seeking to enforce past child support judgments.

"There is a huge difference between the two," Nelson said.

Online directories show that Hess is living in Kenmore, Wash., north of Seattle. A listing of his address on the real estate website Zillow describes it as a 9,400-square foot, 18-bedroom, 9.25-bath "Santa Fe/Taos/Puebla-style Hacienda on 5 acres" complete with "10,000 sq ft garden; 25 fruit trees; gazebo; 2 large sculptures; tennis court with basketball hoop; cabana with fireplace and grill along creek."

Its estimated value is listed at \$1.27 million.

Hess served as a delegate for the Republican National Convention last year and Federal Election Commission records show he made three donations totaling \$3,375 to the Washington State Republican Party in 2012.

Schroer, 60, said she is living on disability and the pension of Gene Schroer, who died in December 2010.

She hired a private detective in 1985, who located her children in Cairo and Hess later served prison time for forgery and securities fraud. Schroer said she came from a wealthy family but Hess "pretty much cleaned us out" and at one point after their divorce she went to a convent of nuns in Paola to solicit help in feeding her children.

"If I had bowed down and given up my pride and applied for welfare, the state would have been after him (for child support) faster than you'd ever believe," Schroer said.

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