

Ex-KLBJ host wins lawsuit

Jury awards James \$715,000 for libel, compensation after radio station canceled contract

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Former Austin radio talk show host Rollye James has won a \$715,000 judgment against KLBJ, which canceled her contract after she suggested that the president, the vice president and the first lady should be killed.

After a weeklong trial in state district court, the jury awarded James \$545,000 for libel and \$170,000 to compensate her for the cancellation of her contract. The verdict was returned Wednesday in State District Judge Suzanne Covington's court.

James was a KLBJ-AM talk show host in 1996 when she told a caller that she doubted she could prompt anyone to shoot the president, but that if she could, she would hope that the shooter's aim was good and that he would hit the vice president and the first lady as well -- for a "trifecta."

The family of former President Lyndon Johnson, which owns KLBJ, was horrified by the comments and asked the management to make sure James would never say anything like it again, said Roy Minton, who represented KLBJ.

Johnson became president after President John F. Kennedy was shot in Dallas in 1963.

When James refused to assure the station manager that she would not repeat the comments, her show was canceled under a provision in her contract that stated that her show would be similar to tapes she had provided before going on the air, Minton said.

But State Rep. Terry Keel, who represented James along with Austin lawyer Steve **Gibbins**, said testimony showed that KLBJ management knew how outlandish James' commentary could get and had not responded to her other provocative statements.

"That type of shock radio was standard Rollye James fare," Keel said. "We were able to show how she made similar comments in the tapes and even on KLBJ, which KLBJ did not react to."

This week's judgment has not been finalized and could be appealed.

Minton said he talked to jurors after the trial and was amazed at how unconcerned they were about James' comments about assassinations.

"They laughed about that," Minton said. "They thought it was quaint and dear that it offended me."

The U.S. Secret Service, which enforces a federal law banning threats against the president, investigated James but decided not to prosecute her.

James' libel complaint was mostly based on an invitation a KLBJ saleswoman had created depicting James as a witch.

The station managers insisted that the invitation was never faxed to advertisers, but they did not have a copy of the toned-down version that was sent, Minton said.

James lived out of her car and drove around the country looking for a job for nearly a year after her show was canceled, Keel said. She found a job at a Philadelphia station, where she now works.

Rollye James: Her talk show was canceled after she suggested the president should be killed.