

Homicide Suspected in Death of Gay Mississippi Mayor Candidate

A candidate for mayor of a small town in Mississippi was found dead by a river on Wednesday morning, the victim of an apparent **homicide**, police said.

Marco McMillian, 34, was one of the first viable, openly gay candidates in **Mississippi**, according to the Victory Fund, a national organization that supports and endorses lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender candidates and officials.

The death of McMillian was not being investigated as a hate crime, said Will Rooker, a spokesman for the Coahoma County Sheriff's office. In addition to being gay, McMillian was African American.

The death is not considered politically motivated, despite intense competition in the race for mayor of the Mississippi Delta city of Clarksdale, said Coahoma County Coroner Scotty Meredith.

Police have a person of interest in custody but are not releasing a name and have not filed charges, Rooker said.

McMillian had been missing since early Tuesday when his sport-utility vehicle was involved in a collision outside Clarksdale. The person driving McMillian's vehicle had collided head on with a pickup truck. McMillian wasn't with the driver and, because his whereabouts were unknown, law enforcement officials launched a search.

His body was found near the base of the Mississippi River in Coahoma County on Wednesday.

A graduate of Jackson State University in Mississippi and CEO of his own firm consulting for nonprofits, McMillian recently

had moved from Memphis back to his hometown of Clarksdale so he could run for mayor as a Democrat. He had faced state Representative Chuck Espy, a Democrat, and former Democratic gubernatorial **candidate** Bill Lockett, an attorney.

While McMillian was gay, his campaign focused on reducing crime and unemployment in Clarksdale, a city of roughly 18,000 people, said campaign spokesman Jarod Keith.

A once-booming agricultural community, the city steadily has bled residents and jobs over the years and now faces staggering violence and unemployment.

“We remember Marco as a bold and passionate public servant, whose faith informed every aspect of his life,” Keith said in a statement. “Tragically, that life has been cut short.”

Editing by Corrie MacLaggan and Lisa Shumaker.

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