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Vote buying in southern West Virginia

[The Charleston Gazette](#) ^ | 12/30/2005 | Tom Searls

Posted on 12/30/2005, 12:47:59 PM by [wvgasman](#)

December 30, 2005 Stowers admits guilt

Clerk says he engaged in vote buying

By Tom Searls Staff writer

Admitting he paid for votes and even decided whose roads would get gravel for votes, Lincoln County Circuit Clerk Greg Stowers entered a guilty plea to a federal vote-buying charge Thursday.

Stowers, 48, admitted to distributing \$7,000 to be used to influence voters during the May 2004 primary election. If he receives any prison term, it will likely be a short one.

In return, he agreed to cooperate with federal investigators in their continuing election fraud investigation and agreed to testify before grand juries and at trials.

“Mr. Stowers, however, will not be required to provide trial testimony against any member of his family,” said Karen George, the assistant U.S. attorney who spearheaded the case.

Stowers, a Hamlin resident, is the son of longtime Lincoln County Democratic chairman Wylie Stowers and the brother of Lyle Stowers, vice chairman of the state Democratic Executive Committee.

Greg Stowers immediately resigned as Lincoln County circuit clerk and from his position on the state Democratic Executive Committee.

“What I did was wrong,” Stowers’ attorney Richard Glaser of Charlotte, N.C., read from a statement for Stowers at a press conference following his admission of guilt.

“I’m trying in a very small way to start to help correct my wrongs. I am cooperating fully with the United States Attorney’s Office. I’m being truthful about all I did and what I know others did.”

Stowers was indicted with a host of others for a conspiracy to control county government in Lincoln County by buying votes, keeping some supporters’ property taxes low, controlling county and state government jobs and rewarding supporters by ensuring their roads were repaired.

Although Stowers admitted to organizing and leading the illegal political group, he could face only slightly more than a year in prison. When sentenced March 15 by U.S. District Judge John Copenhaver Jr., prosecutors said they would recommend he spend his sentence on home confinement if he fully cooperates with their investigation between now and March.

Copenhaver noted Stowers’ ultimate sentence will rest with him, not prosecutors.

Stowers also agreed to not participate in politics for at least 10 years.

He told the court he gave the \$7,000 in cash to Wandell “Rocky” Adkins, the lone co-defendant in the case to yet enter a plea agreement, although he has scheduled one. “I assume he bought votes [with the cash],” Stowers

said.

Adkins' attorney said there is "not much room" left in the case to manipulate for his client and said Adkins will plead guilty to an election fraud charge.

Sitting in the courtroom during Stowers' plea hearing, afterwards Adkins noted he's the last defendant left standing. "You ever see a snowflake on a coal pile?" he said.

Also entering guilty pleas before Copenhaver Thursday were co-defendants Toney "Zeke" Dingess, 35, and Ralph Dale Adkins, 58.

"All I know is Greg Stowers gave me some money," said Ralph Adkins, who admitted buying votes in the Branchland area for Stowers during the 1992 primary election.

Adkins said Stowers "just met me and gave me a bunch of slates."

Dingess entered a similar plea dealing with the 2004 primary election in the Harts area.

"I went there more or less as a bodyguard for Rocky Adkins," he told the court. "He's a sick man."

Dingess said he carried more than \$5,000 for Rocky Adkins that day. After Rocky Adkins handed a candidate slate to a potential voter, Dingess said Adkins would raise one finger if he was to pay that person \$20, or two fingers if it was a \$40 payment.

On Tuesday, Stowers' longtime political ally Jerry Weaver, 56, entered a guilty plea and faces up to five years in prison. Weaver, who had served as Lincoln County assessor since 1981, was considered the Stowers political faction's bagman.

Weaver told the court he would resign as assessor. It was unclear if he had done so Thursday.

Stowers and most of the other defendants had been fighting the charges since May, though Weaver was not indicted until August.

On Wednesday, another defendant, Clifford "Groundhog" Vance, pleaded guilty to vote buying.

Originally federal prosecutors had also indicted Jackie David Adkins for vote buying, but dismissed those charges in August. On Thursday, Dingess implicated him in the election fraud case, which could cause a new indictment.

In the press conference after the guilty pleas, Acting U.S. Attorney Chuck Miller congratulated prosecutors George and Larry Ellis, along with federal and state investigators. The investigation has been ongoing at least since 2002.

"For too long, the taint of election fraud has hung like a cloud over Southern West Virginia," Miller said at the press conference. "I hope these [guilty pleas] send a message."

Stowers' statement called on others to stop the dirty politics.

"I'm here today to say that what I did has to stop," his attorney read from Stowers' statement. "If my friends in Lincoln County are to really benefit from fair elections, vote-buying has got to stop.

"We can't continue to go down the path I willingly followed over these years."

Miller said the investigation has shown corrupt politics is "very widespread" in Southern West Virginia.

Copenhaver had held the defendants' feet to the fire, refusing their motions to continue the trial, which had been set to begin Jan. 3. The pleas wrap up the case, but Miller vowed any additional information discovered through the cooperation of Stowers or from investigators will be pursued. "Wherever they'll lead, we'll follow," he vowed.

Federal prosecutors also have an ongoing election fraud investigation into neighboring Logan County that so far has produced seven guilty pleas. Included were two Logan County officials: County Clerk Glen Dale "Hound Dog" Adkins and Sheriff John Mendez.

In addition, former Logan police chief Alvin "Chipper" Porter Jr., attorney Mark Hrutkay, former four-term Logan mayor Tom Esposito, Logan VFW president Ernest Stapleton and former United Mine Workers official French Perry Harvey have all entered related guilty pleas.

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After more than 200 years of elections in the US we apparently still have folks who don't understand the concept of "free elections". I suppose we shouldn't be too surprised if it takes a while to get the wrinkles ironed out of the election process in a land dominated by Sadaam and umpteen warlords, dictators, tribal chiefs and kings before him. Southern WV (and I think eastern KY) have been polluted with election fraud forever. Fortunately there seems to be some federal prosecutors attempting to make a serious dent in it now. Alright class, time for a pop quiz where is Senator Byrd from??? Southern WV!!

1 posted on **12/30/2005, 12:48:00 PM** by **wvgasman**

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To: **wvgasman**

Now the rest of the country should understand the battles we have had to fight here.

2 posted on **12/30/2005, 12:53:11 PM** by **GOP_Proud** ("smooth as butt-ahh"... Toolbelt Diva)

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To: **wvgasman**

I like the nicknames in this story. We've got a Rocky, a Zeke , a Chipper, a Hound Dog and even a Ground Hog. Very nice.

3 posted on **12/30/2005, 12:55:01 PM** by **snakedriver**

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To: **wvgasman**

Sheets Byrd has been buying votes since he was elected. But in his case they just call it pork.

4 posted on **12/30/2005, 12:56:32 PM** by **Sthitch**

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To: **wvgasman**

You may recall that LBJ was running in the presidential primary against JFK in 1960. LBJ accused Kennedy's Dad of supplying the money to buy votes in West Virginia.