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BREAKING NEWS

Police use saliva to arrest Casselberry man on voter-fraud charges

By **MARTIN E. COMAS**
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Bret Warren (Seminole County Sheriff's Office)

State and local investigators said they used fingerprints and DNA from saliva found on five mail-in ballots to track down a Casselberry man and charge him with voter fraud.

Bret Warren, 36, was arrested Wednesday and booked into the Seminole County Jail on several other charges, including possession of oxycodone.

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"It's really an interesting case in how we were able to find him," said Evelyn Estevez, a public information officer for the Altamonte Springs Police Department.

In October 2016, days before the general election, several residents of the Spring Valley neighborhood in Altamonte Springs reported to the Seminole County Supervisor of Elections Office that they had not received their absentee ballots.

The elections office called law-enforcement officials after discovering that the five residents' ballots apparently were stolen and turned in with fake signatures and with votes cast.

Investigators with the Altamonte Springs Police Department, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Seminole County Sheriff's Office lifted DNA evidence from the portion of the envelopes that are sealed with saliva, according to a police report.

Investigators also were able to match the fingerprints on the envelopes with Warren's fingerprints in a federal registry, police said. An FDLE laboratory report indicated that the DNA on the envelopes matched Warren's, according to the police report.

When police arrived at Warren's Casselberry home on Paseo Del Mar, Warren opened the door a few inches and had the chain lock attached to the door, according to an Altamonte Springs Police report.

Warren told police through a two-inch gap on the door that his parents used to live on Buttercup Circle in the Spring Valley neighborhood, according to police. He then said he wanted to speak to his attorney before answering any more questions, according to police.

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Seminole County Supervisor of Elections Michael Ertel said the Spring Valley residents affected by the fraudulent ballots were able to cast provisional ballots in time for the November 2016 general election.

"We take every single vote seriously and treat them individually," Ertel said. "Our office reviews every single mail ballot which is returned, and these were flagged as potentially not being returned by the voters. The signature on the outside of the mail ballot envelopes did not match the signature we have on file for the impacted voters."

Ertel said it's unknown which candidates the fraudulent ballots were cast for because the ballots were sealed when turned over to law enforcement. Warren is not a registered voter.

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