

**PROBATION ORDERED IN VOTE FRAUD HE WAS THE ONLY DEFENDANT
TO ADMIT GUILT IN THE 2D DISTRICT. THE SENTENCE REFLECTED HIS
COOPERATION.**

The Philadelphia Inquirer

September 27, 1994 Tuesday FINAL EDITION

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The Philadelphia Inquirer

Found on Philly.com

Section: LOCAL; Pg. B06

Length: 503 words

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Body

Ramon Pratt, the only defendant to plead guilty in last November's absentee ballot scandal, was sentenced yesterday to two years of probation for illegally recruiting voters to cast absentee ballots.

Senior Common Pleas Court Judge Warren G. Morgan 3d said he was granting a light sentence to **Pratt**, 48, because he had cooperated with prosecutors seeking evidence against others involved in the Nov. 2 vote fraud in the Second State Senate District.

But Morgan stressed that he considered the offenses serious.

"I cannot overstate what an abuse . . . this was. It strikes at the very heart of democracy," said Morgan, a Dauphin County judge, who heard three of the eight criminal cases already filed in the scandal.

Pratt, who was a street worker in last fall's campaign of Democrat William G. Stinson, pleaded guilty to 22 counts of election law violations, including telling voters to apply for absentee ballots when they were not eligible.

He admitted telling voters they could use absentee ballots for convenience. State law limits the ballots' use to voters who are out of Philadelphia on election day on business or who cannot go to the polls because of illness or disability.

In February, U.S. District Judge Clarence C. Newcomer nullified Stinson's victory after finding that he had been elected through massive absentee ballot fraud. Newcomer later seated Bruce S. Marks, Stinson's Republican opponent.

Pratt, whom voters readily identified because he wears his long gray hair in a ponytail, could have been sentenced to as much as a year in prison and a \$5,000 fine on each of the 22 counts.

His attorney, Felix Gonzalez, said after the sentencing that his client had "provided information that has been useful" to prosecutors. He would not elaborate.

In an interview earlier this year, **Pratt** said he told prosecutors that in late November, after details of the fraud began to surface, Josue Santiago, who had been Stinson's coordinator in the Latino community and **Pratt**'s boss, had

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burned hundreds of absentee ballots that had been completed but not turned in to election officials. He said Santiago burned the ballots in Pratt's back- yard barbecue pit.

"There were hundreds, hundreds," Pratt said in an interview at his Kensington home.

Santiago, who has declined to make any comments about his election activity, has not been charged with any criminal violations. His attorney, Jeffrey M. Lindy, has denied Pratt's allegations.

The state Attorney General's Office initially was working with the FBI to investigate the Second District vote fraud. Federal agents searched Pratt's barbecue in the winter and found pieces of charred ballots.

"There were big pieces that didn't burn. You could see they were ballots," said Pratt, a plumber by trade.

The FBI later turned over the burned ballots to state investigators, law enforcement sources said.

Pratt said he also helped prosecutors obtain a videotape showing Stinson recruiting campaign workers to work in the Latino neighborhood, where much of the vote fraud occurred.

Load-Date: October 21, 2002

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