https://www.unionleader.com/news/crime/atkinson-man-fined-1-000-for-voting-twice-cant-ever-again-vote-in-nh/article_77ad26a4-b8a8-5a85-ae80-b510081e93cc.html

Atkinson man fined $1,000 for voting twice, can't ever again vote in NH

By Jason Schreiber Union Leader Correspondent
Nov 7, 2019

Robert Bell, left, was sentenced Thursday in Rockingham County Superior Court after he was found guilty of double voting in the 2018 midterm election.

Jason Schreiber/Union Leader Correspondent

BRENTWOOD — A 77-year-old Atkinson man won’t go to jail but will have to pay a $1,000 fine and perform 50 hours of community service after he was convicted of voting twice in the 2018 midterm election.

Robert Bell was sentenced Thursday after a Rockingham County jury last month convicted him of voting in more than one state in the same election.

Bell, an Air Force veteran, had admitted he cast ballots just days apart in New Hampshire and Florida last November.

Assistant Attorney General Nick Chong Yen requested a 12-month jail sentence, with all but one week suspended, along with a $4,000 fine.

Alan Cronheim, Bell's defense attorney, argued that jail time was inappropriate for the felony-level crime and painted Bell as a victim of a political climate where politicians have made claims of widespread voter fraud and a "rigged" election system when they don't win.

"This case is not, in the end, about Bob Bell. It's about the concept of voting fraud and the use of it in the political system. … It's about the political issue of voting fraud," Cronheim told Rockingham County Superior Court Judge Martin Honigberg.

Cronheim insisted that Bell wouldn't vote twice again and said he wasn't someone who was conniving with others to engage in voter fraud.

"This is a good man who has made a mistake, who has acknowledged that mistake, who has accepted the jury verdict," he said.

Chong Yen, the state prosecutor, argued that a week in jail was warranted.

"This is the conduct that our state has recognized as a felony offense," he said.

Honigberg sentenced Bell to 90 days in jail, but suspended the sentence. He won't have to serve it as long as he stays out of trouble. He also has to pay a $1,000 fine and perform 50 hours of community service within 90 days.

As a consequence of the conviction, Bell will also lose his right to vote in the Granite State.

Under the law, Bell faced a maximum 3-1/2 to 7 years in prison, up to a $4,000 fine, and the loss of voting rights under the New Hampshire Constitution.

Bell, who used to own a home in Florida, admitted he had voted early in Palm Coast, Fla., on Nov. 1 last year, during a visit. He returned to New Hampshire and voted in the same election for state and federal offices on Nov. 6 in Atkinson.

Chong Yen has said Bell, a registered Republican, was aware that Florida's gubernatorial and U.S. Senate races were tight and that he was more interested in them.

Bell testified that he thought the Atkinson election was for town races, but realized a problem when he saw that state and federal offices were on the ballot. Chong Yen said Bell had a "moment of reflection," but still decided to vote, knowing that he had already voted in Florida.

Still, Cronheim maintained that there was no criminal intent behind his actions.

RockinghamNews@unionleader.com

Jason Schreiber

<]