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State voter fraud investigation results in two more arrests in Chesterfield

Mark Bowes
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Two more people have been charged with voting fraud offenses following a Virginia State Police investigation of voter registration irregularities from the 2008 general election that so far has yielded 40 arrests statewide.

Sheila J. Peterson, 53, was indicted Monday by a Chesterfield County grand jury on one felony count of making a false statement on an election form on Oct. 3, 2008, according to court records. Last week, Michael Anthony Harris, 50, was arrested in Chesterfield on a similar charge for an offense that occurred on Sept. 26, 2008, records show.

Chesterfield authorities allege that both defendants registered to vote for the 2008 election despite having been previously convicted of felonies. Felons cannot vote in Virginia unless their rights are restored by the governor. It was not immediately clear whether they also voted in the election.

The arrests are the latest to come from a state police review of 400-plus complaints forwarded to the agency for investigation in October 2008, before the November election, by then-State Board of Elections Secretary Nancy Rodrigues. The investigation was limited to those complaints and did not expand into a comprehensive review of election fraud in Virginia.

So far, 40 people have been charged and warrants have been obtained for a 41st person who can't be located. A majority of those cases have resulted in convictions, and 24 additional cases are being actively investigated, state police said.

In early April, the Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney's Office obtained indictments against 10 people — all convicted felons — for making false statements on voter registration forms in 2008. Commonwealth's Attorney Michael N. Herring said each of those indicted spoke with a solicitor who was trying to get people to register to vote and, in most cases, the solicitor falsely told the felon they could vote.

The majority of the cases reviewed by the Richmond Times-Dispatch that resulted in arrests in central Virginia involved felons who either registered to vote or who illegally voted in the general election, or both.

A total of 194 cases statewide in which state police determined a violation likely occurred have been closed because the commonwealth's attorneys in those localities declined to prosecute those individuals for various reasons, state police said. More than 40 percent of those cases — 82 — were not prosecuted in Richmond.

In neighboring Chesterfield, the commonwealth's attorney's office has pursued charges against 10 people and declined to prosecute three, according to state police figures. Four cases are still being actively investigated.

The Henrico County Commonwealth's Attorney's Office has not prosecuted any of the eight cases forwarded to it by state police. Four additional cases remain active, police said.

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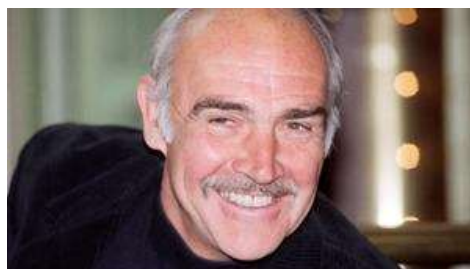
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