

NEWS

California man who registered dogs, dead father to vote, sentenced to probation

Kate Cimini The Californian

Published 3:42 p.m. PT Aug. 16, 2019 | Updated 3:44 p.m. PT Aug. 16, 2019

A Pacific Grove man said he registered his dead father and four dogs to vote so he could highlight voter fraud.

Now, after doing so, he faces three years's probation for committing voter registration fraud himself.

Richard Davis, 68, says he was so perturbed by national reports of voter fraud that he admits to falsely registering his golden retrievers and deceased father to vote.

"I was trying to do my patriotic duty and just bring awareness," said Davis.

Although registering the dogs didn't bring the authorities down on him -- though he called and told them exactly what he was doing -- registering his father did. He was slapped with a felony by the Monterey County District Attorney's Office in October 2018 and sentenced to probation Friday.

Davis's clashes with voter registration began in 2012, when he learned registration was open online, with no in-person trip or photo ID to required.

"I was curious about what type of checks they do on who's on the other side of the computer," Davis said. The answer, that the person must sign an affidavit swearing to their identity and ability to vote, didn't sit well with him.

And so, he decided to register his dog to vote.

To expose what he believed to be a fatal flaw in the system, Davis decided to register his golden retrievers with the Democratic Party.

Davis reported himself to the county District Attorney's office so as to ward off legal ramifications for the fraudulent registration, and called local news station KSBW, which ran

a story on his protest.

Monterey County Assistant District Attorney Berkley Brannon said the DA's office warned Davis to stop filing fictitious voter registrations after registering golden retriever Pfeiffer to vote.

"We appreciate his political activism on this and told him not to do it again," said Brannon. "He went ahead and did it again."

In the following years Davis registered another golden retriever, Chantarelle, and then two more dogs in succession: Rocky and Cooper. Finally, he registered his father, Eugene William Davis, a retired military officer born in 1923, after he had died.

Davis registered his father, as well as the retrievers, as Democrats in Monterey County. He believed he'd have an easier time registering them as Democrats, since California and Monterey County in particular lean heavily blue, he said.

Davis did not complete his father's registration, nor did he cast votes under his or his dogs' names. That, however, did not matter, said Brannon.

Around the 2018 election, the Monterey County Election Board flagged Davis' father's registration and passed it on to the Monterey County District Attorney's Office for consideration for prosecution.

The DA charged Davis with a felony, the complaint showed.

According to state law, it is illegal to procure the completion of a voter registration in whole or in part, or file an affidavit of a voter registration with the intent to cause the registration of a fictitious person, Brannon said.

Davis took umbrage at that.

"At what point are you guilty," Davis asked. "If you fill out one letter, or one line? Or the whole thing?"

Today Davis regrets his decision to register his retrievers and his recently-deceased father to vote, but he still believes not enough is being done to prevent potential voter fraud.

"To me it was a big red flag to conduct voter registration online," said Davis. "It could be hacked. What do we do next election when Russia erases all our names? Or registers a bunch of fictitious people? What's to stop them from doing it? I did it, and I'm a 68-year-old man."

In recent years, shouts of voter fraud by politicians such as President Donald Trump and California politician Shawn Steel have made headlines in national media.

But according to a 2017 report by the Brennan Center, a nonpartisan law and policy institute focused on voting rights and campaign finance reform, only four cases of voter fraud were found in the 2016 election throughout the entire U.S.

The report found that most reported incidents of voter fraud were actually clerical errors or bad data matching practices.

Actual incident rates of voter fraud run between 0.0003% and 0.00025%, meaning it is more likely an American "will be struck by lightning than that he will impersonate another voter at the polls," the report says.

Davis' case is "a reminder that elections officials and law enforcement take election integrity seriously in California," said Sam Mahood, press secretary to California Secretary of State Alex Padilla in an email to The Salinas Californian.

"There is no evidence of widespread voter fraud in California," Mahood added. "President Donald Trump has repeatedly lied, falsely claiming that millions voted illegally. He and his administration have provided zero evidence to support these claims, and the President's 'Commission on Election Integrity' folded without ever discovering or providing any evidence of widespread voter fraud."

Davis is also prohibited from registering anyone but himself to vote, from using the online voter registration system, and from threatening or harrassing employees of the Monterey County Elections department, the DA said.

He must also complete 48 hours of community service for a non-profit organization

Kate Cimini is a multimedia journalist for The Californian. Have a tip? Call her at (831) 776-5137 or email kcimini@thecalifornian.com. Subscribeto support local journalism.