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Raney, Brown plead guilty to ballot fraud; Judge Wilson gives both two years probation

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The three year investigation into voter irregularities surrounding the 2007 City of Jackson general election has come to a close.

Former Jackson City Council Member Tommy Raney and Raney's campaign worker, Debra Brown, pled guilty to conspiracy to commit absentee ballot fraud in Butts County Superior Court last week.

Judge Tommy Wilson sentenced both Raney and Brown to two years probation.

Raney resigned his position with the Jackson City Council in September 2009.

~~District Attorney Richard Milam, on refferal from the state, reviewed the case and then presented it~~
to the grand jury last week. Both Raney and Brown were indicted and then appeared before Judge Wilson in Superior Court.

Milam said Judge Wilson decided additional fines were unreasonable in light of the amount the state levied.

The Secretary of State's inspector general's investigation culminated with findings of voter fraud and Raney was fined \$158,000, Brown \$20,000. The inspector general determined Raney filled out two voter registration applications for electors; filled out and took possession of 48 absentee ballot applications for electors after they were signed; and filled in elector information on at least two absentee ballot envelopes for electors. Brown was found to have unlawfully "assisted numerous absentee electors" with voter registration applications and absentee ballots.

The investigation, completed in 2008, cast serious doubts on whether Raney legitimately - and legally - retained his seat.

Raney's 2007 election opponent, Larry Pickett, filed the complaint that started the investigation.

Raney defeated Pickett by a total of 27 votes and benefited from 67 absentee votes. Pickett tallied only 20 absentee votes. The investigation stated that "of the 57 electors who returned absentee ballots by mail, 49 were assisted in some manner by either Brown and/or Raney."

Beth Smith defeated Pickett in the November 2009 election and assumed the Council seat vacated by Raney.