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## Indiana Dem official sentenced to prison for '08 ballot fraud in Obama-Clinton primary



By Eric Shawn, | Fox News



From left, Butch Morgan, Pam Brunette, Beverly Shelton and Dustin Blythe were charged April 2, 2012, in an election fraud case from the 2008 Indiana Democratic primary.

As Hillary Clinton prepares for a possible presidential run in 2016, it appears that she could have knocked then-candidate Barack Obama off the 2008 primary ballot in Indiana.

If anyone, including her campaign, had challenged the names and signatures on the presidential petitions that put Obama on the ballot, election fraud would have been detected during the race.

But at the time, no one did.

On Monday, there was some closure to the case, though, as the four defendants who were convicted or pleaded guilty in the state's presidential petition fraud scandal were sentenced. Only one received prison time for the illegal scheme that touched the race for the White House.

"If there is a victim here, it is probably the Democratic Party," said St. Joseph Superior Court Judge John Marnocha. "The defendants who were saying, 'I was just following orders,' or 'I was just doing my duty,' that's no excuse. Through history a lot of evil has been done by those saying they were just following orders."

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The plot successfully faked names and signatures on both the Obama and Clinton presidential petitions that were used to place the candidates on the ballot. So many names were forged -- an estimated 200 or more -- that prosecutor Stanley Levco said that had the fraud been caught during the primary, "the worst that would have happened, is maybe Barack Obama wouldn't have been on the ballot for the primary."

"I think that Obama would still have been elected president, no matter what," he said.

In court, former longtime St. Joseph County Democratic Chairman Butch Morgan, Jr. was sentenced to one year behind bars, and is expected to serve half that, as well as Community Corrections and probation. Former St. Joseph County Board of Elections worker and Democratic volunteer Dustin Blythe received a sentence of one year in Community Corrections and probation, which means no jail time.

In April, a jury convicted Morgan and Blythe on numerous felony conspiracy counts to commit petition fraud and felony forgery counts.

Former St. Joseph County Board of Voter Registration Democratic board member Pam Brunette and Board of Voter Registration worker Beverly Shelton previously pleaded guilty and testified for prosecutors against Morgan and Blythe. They both received two years of probation.

"When you do something like this, we are going to find out and you're going to be held accountable," declared Levco. He called the sentences "appropriate."

Others disagreed.

"We would like to have seen more jail time for Morgan ... but it was more than we were expecting," said St. Joseph County Republican Party Executive Director Jake Teshka. He thinks the three other

defendants "got off easy."

The election fraud was first uncovered by Yale University junior Ryan Nees, who wrote about the scheme for the independent political newsletter *Howey Politics Indiana* and the *South Bend Tribune*.

Nees has told Fox News that the fraud was clearly evident, "because page after page of signatures are all in the same handwriting."

He also noted that no one raised any red flags about the forgeries, and that the petitions sailed through the Board of Elections without any problems, "because election workers in charge of verifying their validity were the same people faking the signatures."

"The most amazing part about this voter fraud case involving the highest office in the United States is the fact that such a few number of people, because of laziness, arrogance or both did not do their job and thus could have affected the outcome of the election," noted St. Joseph County Republican Party Charwoman Dr. Deborah Fleming.

Morgan was accused of being the scheme's mastermind who ordered the petition fraud. Blythe, then a Board of Elections employee, was accused of forging multiple pages of the Obama petitions.

Under state law, presidential candidates need to qualify for the primary ballots with 500 signatures from each of the state's nine congressional districts. Indiana election officials say that in St. Joseph County, which is the 2nd Congressional district, the Obama campaign qualified with 534 signatures; Clinton's camp had 704.

Prosecutors said that in President Obama's case, nine of the petition pages were apparently forged. Each petition contains up to 10 names, making a possible total of 90 faked names, which could have brought the Obama total below the legal limit that was required for him to qualify for the ballot.

Prosecutors said 13 Clinton petitions were apparently forged, meaning up to 130 possibly fake signatures. Even if those names had been challenged, Clinton would still have been left with enough signatures to meet the 500-person threshold comfortably.

The scheme was hatched in January of 2008, four months before the primary, according to affidavits from investigators. Former Board of Registration worker and Democratic Party volunteer Lucas Burkett told them he forged signatures and was part of the forgery plan at first, but then became uneasy about what was going on and quit.

Burkett told investigators that "there were meetings at which several people explicitly agreed to forge these petitions," and that it was his job to "forge petitions for candidate Barack Obama." He told authorities that Shelton "was assigned to forge petitions for candidate Hillary Clinton" and Blythe "was assigned to forge petitions for candidate John Edwards." When Edwards dropped out of the race at the end of January 2008 and Burkett refused to continue the forgeries, Burkett said Morgan ordered Blythe to take over his job and forge the Obama petitions.

Numerous voters told Fox News that they never signed them.

"That's not my signature," Charity Rorie, a mother of four, told Fox News when showed the Obama petition with her name and signature on it. She was stunned, saying that it "absolutely" was a fake, as well as the name and signature of her husband, Jeff.

"It's scary, it's shocking. It definitely is illegal," she told us.

Robert Hunter, Jr. told Fox News that his name was faked, too.

"I did not sign for Barack Obama," he said, as he looked at the petition listing his name and signature.

Even a former Democratic governor of Indiana, Joe Kernan, told Fox News that his name was forged.

Clinton narrowly won the Indiana 2008 primary, and Obama barely won the state during the general election.

Democratic officials insist that the petition procedures involved in placing candidates on the ballot have since been cleaned up.

"The St. Joseph County Democratic Party has taken many steps to ensure that an incident of this sort never occurs again," insisted Indiana state Sen. John Broden, the St. Joseph County Democratic Party chairman. He notes that no Democratic elected officials or political candidates were implicated in the wrongdoing.

In a statement to Fox News, Broden explained that officials have taken a variety of steps to prevent a repeat of the 2008 election fraud.

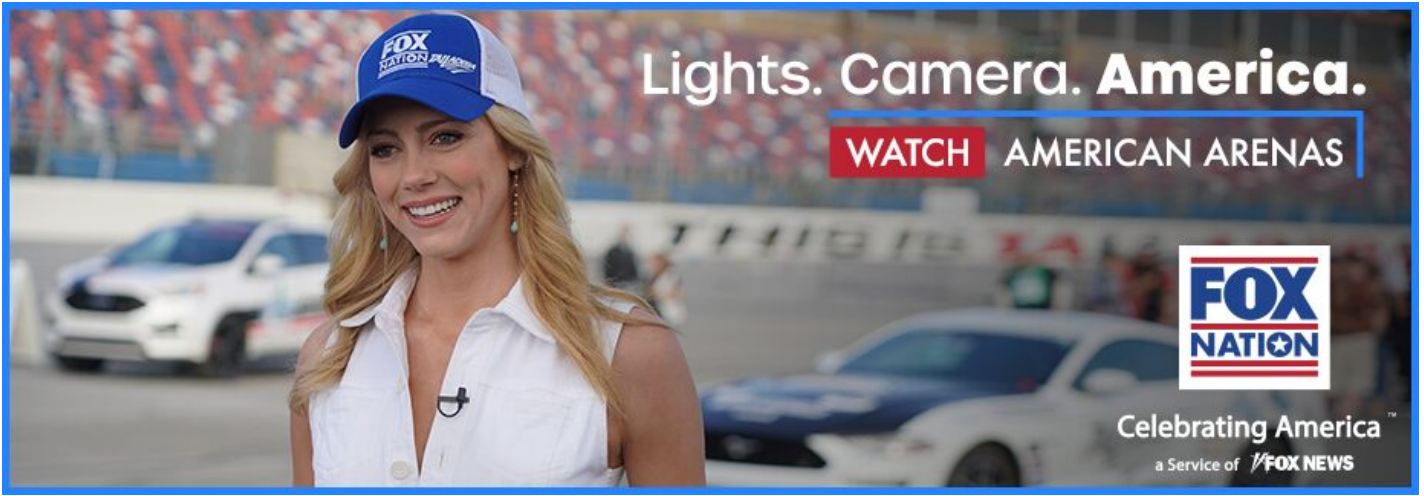
During the recent 2012 presidential election, he said that those steps included examining and cross checking "every single signature ... with the voter's actual signature on file," as well as the Board of Elections working "in a bipartisan fashion to review the signatures submitted."

Broden said that since the new safeguards were put in place, "there has been no allegation of any impropriety concerning the 2012 ballot petitions."

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