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Election misconduct defendant pleads guilty

By JEFF REINITZ,
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WATERLOO, Iowa --- The last person charged with election misconduct in connection with the 2008 races has pleaded guilty.

Martia Yvonne Phillips, 26, entered her plea Tuesday morning in a judge's chambers while prospective jurors for her trial waited in the courtroom.

Under the plea, Phillips was sentenced to five years in prison, suspended to two years of self probation. Fines were also suspended.

Phillips was one of 11 people to face similar charges after voter rolls turned up convicted felons who had voted before their rights were restored and other voters who gave bogus addresses when registering, said Assistant Black Hawk County Attorney Linda Fangman. She said it appeared the defendants had received the wrong information about their eligibility to vote.



Those charged with election misconduct for voting without restored rights include Brandon James Dean, Jennifer Marie Burcham, Denise Cooper, George Oliver Tyler, George Willard Vaughn, Albert Arnaz Meeks Jr., Kevin Janeau and Andrew Lee Peterson.

Two others --- Michael Loudermilk and Floyd Willie Boldon --- allegedly used other people's addresses when registering to vote, authorities said.

All pleaded guilty earlier.

Phillips's situation was similar to most of the cases.

At the time of the 2008 election, convicted felons had an automatic process --- set up by former Gov. Tom Vilsack three years earlier --- to restore their voting rights if they were out of prison and off parole or probation.

The Iowa Department of Corrections forwarded the names of people who had discharged their sentences to the governor's office for consideration, and certificates of restoration were to be sent to the person's last known address in two or three months.

Phillips, who had a 2006 felony drug conviction, was still on probation during the election, according to Department of Corrections records. She wasn't eligible to vote, prosecutors said.

Phillips' probation ended in November 2009, and her reinstatement of voting rights arrived in February 2010. But by that time, she was awaiting trial in the election misconduct case.

The automatic restoration program was scrapped in January by incoming Gov. Terry Branstad, who implemented a system where convicted felons have to petition the governor to be allowed to vote.

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