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Admitting fraud — 03/20/08

Mar 19, 2008



When Charles Newton Weaver was selected to be a paid election official during the 2006 primary in Clay County, his assignment was to help insure that the election was conducted fairly. Instead, Weaver used his position of trust to change the votes cast for other candidates to votes for the candidates he supported.

In U.S. District Court in London Monday, Weaver pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit voter fraud. He admitted to changing the votes cast for Clay County officials during the May 2006 primary.

Acting U.S. Attorney James Zerhusen's office says Weaver, 36, intentionally led voters unfamiliar with new electronic voting machines to believe their vote was cast by pressing one button when a second button was required to cast the vote.

After the duped voters had left the voting machines, Weaver changed their votes before pressing the proper button to cast that ballot. Thus, instead of every voter getting to cast their ballots for the candidates of their choice, Weaver's actions disenfranchised some voters while giving himself the right to vote multiple times. Needless to say, Weaver's misdeeds skewed the results of the primary election in Clay County.

Weaver is hardly the first person headed for jail because of voter fraud during the 2006 election. In Bath County, the judge-executive and county attorney were both forced to resign after pleading guilty to charges of vote fraud.

And just one day after Weaver pleaded guilty, former Clay County magistrate Freddy Clinton Johnson, 69, was sentenced 14 months in prison and fined \$10,000 for conspiring to buy votes in the 2002 county elections. Zerhusen's office said Johnson, who pleaded guilty in November, admitted conspiring with others to pay people for their votes in the May 2002 primary election in

Clay County. He also admitted that he provided money to others to carry voters and buy votes.

The message from all this is clear: More than 220 years after the writing of the U.S. Constitution, true democracy still is not fully realized in some Kentucky counties, particularly when it comes to the election of county offices. The most serious crime of people like Weaver and Johnson is the damage they do to representative government of the people, by the people and for the people. When people hired as watchdogs over an election — as Weaver was — cheat, it seriously damages the faith honest people place in government.

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