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Kentucky Democrat Judge-Executive Indicted for Vote Buying in 1998 Primary

[Lexington, KY, Herald-Leader](#) ^ | 04-25-03 | Estep, Bill

Posted on 4/25/2003, 6:07:46 PM by [Theodore R.](#)

Knott judge-executive is indicted OFFICIAL AND THREE MEN ARE CHARGED WITH BUYING VOTES
By Bill Estep HERALD-LEADER STAFF WRITER

Knott County Judge-Executive Donnie Newsome took part in a conspiracy to buy votes in the primary election he won five years ago, a federal grand jury charged yesterday.

Three other Knott County residents also were charged yesterday with buying votes in the May 1998 primary. That brings to 16 the number of people charged as a result of an FBI investigation of the election, making it one of the larger vote-fraud cases in Kentucky in recent years.

Newsome, a Democrat, is the only officeholder who has been charged in the case, although two relatives of Knott County Attorney Randy Slone are under indictment and a third was convicted.

U.S. Attorney Gregory Van Tatenhove issued a statement yesterday condemning vote-buying. Rooting out the pernicious practice is a priority for federal prosecutors, he said.

"Representative government is diminished when the worth of honest ballots is diluted by ballots bought by those who seek to corrupt the election process," Van Tatenhove said. "When this happens, democracy is jeopardized."

Newsome, who was re-elected last year to a second term, did not return a phone call seeking comment.

Willard Smith, 54, of Hindman and Keith Pigman, 45, of Garner were charged in one indictment with Newsome, 52.

The three allegedly schemed to steal the election by inducing people to vote by absentee ballot.

That is one method vote-buyers use to ensure people they have paid vote as they are supposed to.

And in two cases, Pigman went into the voting booth with voters after they certified they needed help, the indictment said.

The indictment listed five voters who allegedly received \$50 from one of the three men, and one whom Newsome allegedly paid \$100.

The indictment said the object of the conspiracy was to secure the election of Newsome and other candidates.

Pigman declined comment yesterday. Smith could not be reached.

The indictment returned yesterday charged Newsome, Pigman and Smith with conspiracy.

Newsome also was charged with two counts of buying votes or aiding and abetting the purchase of votes. Smith was charged with four counts of that offense and Pigman with two.

Each charge carries a sentence of up to five years for a conviction.

After Newsome was elected, Pigman got a job with the county road crew but was let go later.

Pigman sued, claiming Newsome terminated him in retaliation after Pigman refused to build a bridge that would have served only a chicken coop filled with fighting roosters. Pigman won a \$535,000 judgment against the county, but the county moved for a new trial and the case was later settled for an undisclosed sum.

A separate indictment returned yesterday charged Newton J. Johnson of Brinkley with four counts of vote-buying, one count of lying to the FBI, and two counts of attempting to obstruct justice.

Johnson asked two voters he had paid to lie to the grand jury, the indictment said.

The charges did not say whom Johnson was supporting.

Richard Pilger, a prosecutor from the U.S. Department of Justice, and assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas L. Self presented yesterday's indictments to the grand jury.

The May 1998 primary in Knott County aroused suspicions of vote fraud even before the votes were counted.

The reason was a relative mountain of more than 1,200 applications for absentee ballots, far more than in counties with far larger populations.

A high level of absentee voting can indicate fraud.

At the time, Marie Cornett, then the Democratic member of the county election board, told the Herald-Leader, "I got calls that they were using anything they could to buy votes: money, whiskey, pills, pot. I told people to call the fraud hotline."

Investigators were on hand as local officials counted the votes.

Six people were indicted in 1999; five of the six were later convicted of buying absentee votes from a dozen students at Alice Lloyd College in Pippa Passes. Charges against the sixth were dismissed after a trial resulted in a hung jury.

The students testified that defendant Lola Jean Slone gave them \$30 for their votes after they went to her store, wearing an "I Voted" sticker as a signal, and bought a soft drink called Mr. Fizz.

Some students testified they were paid to vote for two successful candidates, Newsome and Randy Slone -- both of whom won re-election last year -- and two unsuccessful candidates: Robert Short, who lost a close election for county clerk to Kenneth Gayheart, and Lola Jean Slone's brother Garfield Slone, a jailer candidate.

Last month, six more people were indicted in the case.

There is a five-year statute of limitations to bring vote-buying charges; that deadline is nearing for the May 1998 primary.

However, work could continue on issues related to the investigation, such as lying to the FBI.

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Knott County is a traditional Democrat near the Virginia border.

1 posted on 4/25/2003, 6:07:46 PM by Theodore R.

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To: Theodore R.

Also home to the Knott County Mafia (all Dems, of course.) It's said by some that Knott County isn't the edge of the earth, but you can see it from there.

2 posted on 4/25/2003, 6:15:53 PM by **toddst**
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To: **Theodore R.**

Nothing new here.. a few years back when Wilkenson was governor.. one school district had, I believe it was, 40+ cooks on the payroll.. of course, they didn't actually work that many cooks but were PAID by the district.. one way of cranking up the political machine when it came time to vote.

3 posted on 4/25/2003, 6:37:24 PM by **Zipporah**
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To: **Theodore R.**

"A high level of absentee voting can indicate fraud."

Makes it a lot easier for the dead to vote!

4 posted on 4/25/2003, 6:45:55 PM by **SwinneySwitch** (Liberate Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, NK, Cuba...; Support the Troops!)
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To: **toddst**

To paraphrase the late Mexican President Porfirio Diaz: "Poor Knott County, so close to Virginia and so far from God!"

5 posted on 4/25/2003, 7:21:37 PM by **Theodore R.**
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To: **Theodore R.**

I'm Proud to be a Knott Countian! As to Judge Executive Donnie Newsome-he did more to help and improve Knott County than any of his predecessors during his first and second partial term in office. If the FBI had wanted to check his opponent's fraudulent behavior...I doubt Judge Newsome's wrongs would barely compare. I suggest you investigate your own county officials and you then compare them to Knott county.

Dallas Harris
Bred, Born in God's Country-Beaver Creek Area of Knott County.

6 posted on 6/3/2004, 12:47:56 AM by **DallasHarris**
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