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Pleads guilty to voter fraud

BY CHRISTI LANDRY THE DAILY IBERIAN

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LAFAYETTE -- A former St. Martinville city councilwoman will remain free on bond after she entered a guilty plea to voter fraud charges Tuesday.

Pam Thibodeaux, the former city council representative for District 3 in St. Martinville, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to submit false information. Thibodeaux will not face three charges of submitting false information in light of her guilty plea.

Thibodeaux and her attorney Gerald Block entered the plea before Judge Richard Haik. She now faces up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release and/or a \$250,000 fine.

During the plea hearing, Haik questioned Thibodeaux about the facts of the case. Thibodeaux acknowledged during questioning that she approached voters Carrie Fruge and Stacie Richard after learning they were considering moving into the district.

Thibodeaux said she filled out the address portion of voter registration cards for Fruge and Richard, using the address of 320 Oliver St. Once she found out that the two had no intention of moving into the district, Thibodeaux failed to report the information to authorities and the two subsequently voted in the election.

Fruge and Richard received probation, community service, fines and court costs after pleading guilty to voter fraud charges in 2004.

When Haik asked Thibodeaux if there was any doubt the information could be proven by U.S. Attorney John Luke Walker, she shook her head no. Thibodeaux's guilty plea was accepted by the court.

According to Walker, a pretrial services report will be done and a sentencing hearing will be scheduled within 90 to 100 days. Haik advised Thibodeaux to fully cooperate with the U.S. probation office in the presentencing investigation and give as much useful information as she

can.

"This was a good resolution to the case. She admitted she did it," said Walker. "What happened in St. Martinville was a travesty, in effect, on the whole electoral process.

"I hope the prosecution made a change for the better in St. Martinville."

Thibodeaux offered no comment after the hearing.

"My observation is she took responsibility for her conduct," he said. " She is going to fully cooperate with probation and the investigation," Block said.

Thibodeaux's opponent in the 2002 election, Mary Francois, also was present for the hearing.

"I think some justice was served. It took three years to bring it about, but it's better late than never," Francois said. "It's a good thing, but it's up to the people to make it right."

In the spring of 2002, Thibodeaux was elected to the District 3 council seat after winning an election against challenger Francois. Thibodeaux won after she received 327 votes, including 52 absentee votes. Francois received 314, including 10 absentee votes.

Francois contested the close outcome of the election, alleging it was plagued with fraudulent activity.

Thibodeaux relinquished her seat on the city council April 4.