

Worcester man pays for 2013 Election Day stunt

By Gary V. Murray TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

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A city man who admitted violating state election laws by casting a ballot in someone else's name in the 2013 municipal election was ordered by a judge today to pay \$1,000 in court costs and perform 200 hours of community service at the local veterans' shelter. "It's tantamount to tampering with war heroes' graveyards," the judge said, adding that many have died defending the rights of Americans, including the right to vote.

WORCESTER — A city man who admitted violating state election laws by casting a ballot in someone else's name in the 2013 municipal election was ordered by a judge today to pay \$1,000 in court costs and perform 200 hours of community service at the local veterans' shelter.

A voter fraud charge against Mark A. Atlas, 53, of 6 Rice Square, was continued without a finding for one year Wednesday in Central District Court after Mr. Atlas admitted to sufficient facts for a guilty finding.

His lawyer, Robert A. Perrone, told Judge Michael G. Allard-Madaus that Mr. Atlas gave his former boss, Richard Suchocki, a ride to the Greenwood Street polling place on Nov. 5, 2013, so that Mr. Suchocki could vote in the city election. Mr. Suchocki, who has since died, was the owner of Massachusetts Pest Elimination and Mr. Atlas was working for him at the time, the defense lawyer said.

Mr. Atlas, who was not a registered voter, accompanied Mr. Suchocki into the polling place. At his boss's urging, Mr. Atlas identified himself as another individual who was known to both men and cast a ballot under that person's

name as “a joke,” according to Mr. Perrone.

The police investigation that led to the charges against Mr. Atlas and Mr. Suchocki was launched after the person in whose name Mr. Atlas had voted showed up at the polling place to cast his ballot, Assistant District Attorney John A. O’Leary told the court.

The charge against Mr. Suchocki was dismissed after he died in October.

Mr. Perrone described his client’s action as a “foolhardy,” but said Mr. Atlas was not paid and was not attempting to influence the results of the election on behalf of any particular candidate or party.

“Stupidity is the answer,” the defense lawyer said.

Mr. Atlas and Mr. Suchocki both gave statements to police, according to Mr. O’Leary.

“They basically said it was a joke. It’s not a joke. It’s a fundamental American right to vote, and to steal that vote from another person is a significant breach,” the assistant district attorney said.

Mr. O’Leary said there was no evidence to suggest that Mr. Atlas’ action was anything other than an ill-advised prank.

Mr. Perrone asked the judge to continue the charge, a felony punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment, without a finding. He said Mr. Atlas was a Navy veteran with no prior convictions and that a guilty finding on a felony would limit his future employment opportunities.

He said Mr. Atlas has worked as an entertainer and stunt man in the past and has portrayed “The Flamboyant Chef” on videos, lighting himself on fire while cooking.

Mr. O’Leary asked the judge to find Mr. Atlas guilty and sentence him to 30 days in the House of Correction, suspended for one year with probation.

“You understand the offensive nature of this?” Judge Allard-Madaus asked the defendant.

“It’s tantamount to tampering with war heroes’ graveyards,” the judge said, adding that many have died defending the rights of Americans, including the right to vote.

He continued the charge without a finding for one year, during which time Mr. Atlas will be on supervised probation. As conditions of probation, Mr. Atlas was ordered to pay \$1,000 in court costs and perform 200 hours of community service at Veterans Inc. on Grove Street.

The judge said the community service would allow Mr. Atlas to “pay back the heroes who have paid for the franchise of voting with their blood.”

The charge will be dismissed in one year if Mr. Atlas complies with the probationary terms and has no further difficulties with the law.

Contact Gary V. Murray at gmurray@telegram.com. Follow him on Twitter [@GaryMurrayTG](https://twitter.com/GaryMurrayTG)