

Youngblood pleads to lesser charge of attempted voter fraud

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ASHEBORO — The former president of the Randolph County TEA Party has accepted a plea bargain in connection with voter fraud.

Robert Lee Youngblood, formerly of 4331 Hoover Hill Road, Trinity, pleaded guilty on Dec. 11 in a Randolph County courtroom to attempted voter fraud/voting more than once in the same primary and to obstruction of justice for providing false information. Both charges are misdemeanors, according to Ray Warburton, an assistant district attorney.

Penalties for the charges could have been 90 days in jail, a \$750 fine and various court costs and fees. But Youngblood was allowed to serve two days in jail and serve 18 months of supervised probation. Once he served the two days and paid the fine and costs, his penalty was transferred to unsupervised probation and he was allowed to move to Florida. If he were to get in trouble with the law, Youngblood would have to return to Randolph County to serve his 90 days in jail.

Warburton said that special conditions with the plea bargain say that Youngblood must abide by all elections laws in the state where he resides. Local authorities will keep a check on his record in Florida during the 18 months. If he keeps his record clean between now and June 2019, Youngblood will have completed his time.

According to North Carolina law, anyone guilty of misdemeanors can still vote. Had Youngblood been convicted of felony voter fraud, he could have faced a fine up to \$10,000 or imprisonment of not more than five years, or both, and relinquished his right to vote until his time was served. North Carolina makes voting fraud a Class I felony.

Warburton said he wasn't familiar with Florida law concerning voting fraud.

The case stems from April 2014, when Youngblood submitted a mail-in ballot for the spring primary, then voted again on the first day of early voting, according to the Randolph County Board of Elections. The checks and balances voting system turned up Youngblood's double vote. The Board of Elections then notified the District Attorney's office.

At the time, Youngblood was among 11 candidates running for three seats on the Randolph County Board of Education. He had run unsuccessfully in 2012.

It was in April 2014 that Youngblood sent a letter to **The Courier-Tribune** saying that he had voted an absentee ballot in the November 2013 general election, then went to his polling place on election day and asked for a ballot. He said that after he received a ballot, he told the poll worker that he had already voted. According to him, he did not cast a second ballot that day.

Warburton, when asked why the District Attorney's office decided to agree to a lesser misdemeanor charge, said that otherwise the case would have gone to a jury trial, which can go either way. With the plea, Youngblood will have the charge on his criminal record, holding him accountable for the offense.