
NEWS

Both parties jeer embrace of fraudulent voter

Sharon Coolidge scoolidge@enquirer.com

Published 6:15 p.m. ET Mar. 21, 2014 | Updated 10:18 a.m. ET Mar. 22, 2014

Story Highlights

The Rev. Al Sharpton was the keynote speaker at a Voters' Bill of Rights rally.

Democrat and Republican leaders condemned the applauding of convicted poll worker Melowese Richardson.

Cincinnati National Action Network President Bobby Hilton says Richardson wasn't applauded for being a felon rather returning home to help her sick sister.

A Hamilton County poll worker who has been held up nationally as an example of voter fraud took the stage at a local voting rights rally – outraging Republicans and dismaying even top local Democrats.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, keynote speaker at Thursday's rally to kick-off the campaign for an Ohio Voters' Bill of Rights Ohio Constitutional amendment, even hugged Melowese Richardson.

Richardson, a Democrat, was convicted of voter fraud after using her position as poll worker to vote more than once in the 2012 presidential election. She got a five year prison term, but was released earlier this month after local Democratic activists pressed for a fairer term.

A judge sentenced her to probation instead.

Richardson was among the more than 400 at Word of Deliverance Church in Forest Park when Cincinnati National Action Network President Bobby Hilton called her on stage for a "welcome home."

A tweet from an Enquirer reporter about the moment sparked immediate outrage from Republicans on Twitter.

Even Democrat leaders questioned the idea of applauding Richardson.

"I am very glad the county prosecutor and judge reconsidered and got her out of jail, but she is not a hero," Hamilton County Democratic Party Chairman Tim Burke, who was at the rally, told the Enquirer. "What she did was criminal conduct and was particularly problematic because of her role as a poll worker."

Hamilton County Democratic Party Executive Director Caleb Faux, who was also at the rally, saw it as an attempt to portray Richardson as a martyr because of the lengthy sentence.

"There is some validity that the sentence was too harsh," Faux told the Enquirer. "But I don't see how you can hold her up as an example of somebody to be proud of. What she did was reprehensible."

Hamilton County Republican Party Chairman Alex Triantafilou asked: "How can you conduct a voting rights rally when you celebrate a person convicted of a voting felony?"

"Do local Democrats applaud a convicted felon for committing voter fraud, because they did at this rally," he added.

But Hilton said the applause had nothing to do with the voter fraud.

"We did not celebrate or applaud a convicted felon," Hitlon said. "We congratulated a lady with a health issues coming home to take care of her sick sister."

Both parties recognized that Richardson's sentence was excessive, Hilton said.

Richardson, 58, was convicted last spring of four counts of illegal voting. The charges say she twice voted in the 2012 election and voted three times in past elections on behalf of her sister, Montez Richardson, who has been in a coma since 2003.

Richardson was previously convicted of threatening to kill a witness in a criminal case against her brother; of stealing; of drunken driving; and of beating someone in a bar fight, according to past Enquirer stories.