

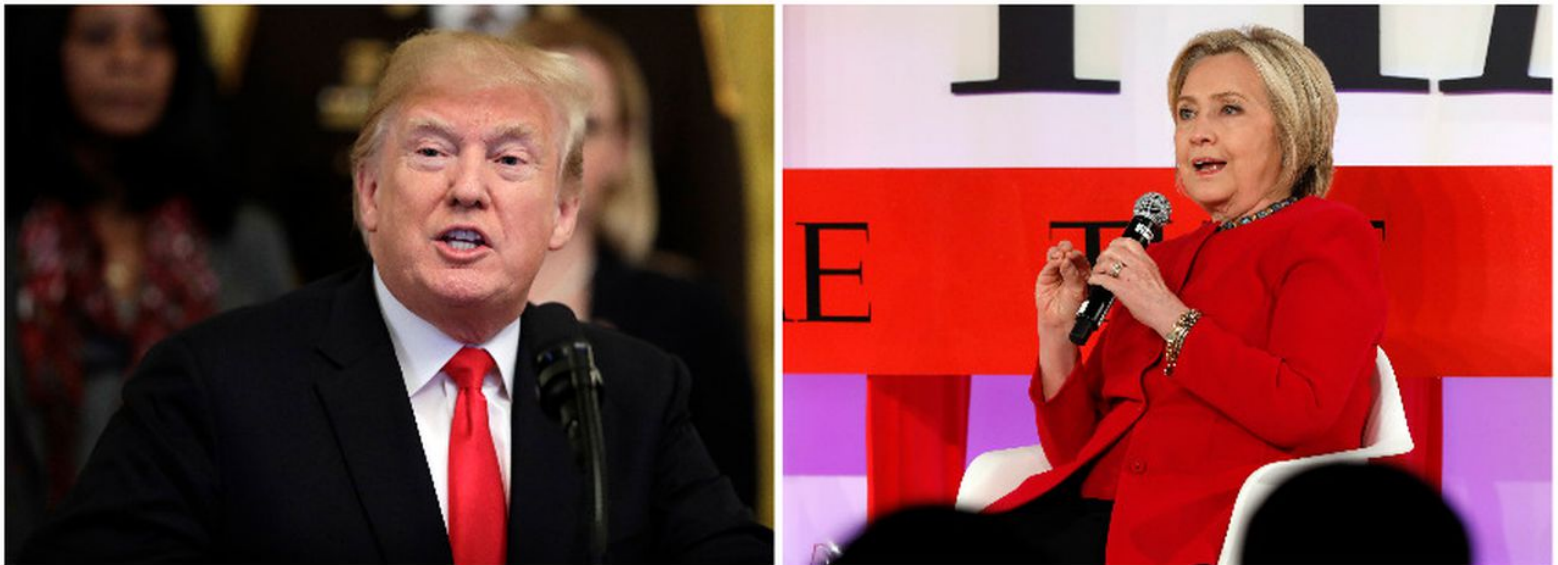
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Politics

10 Oregon voters plead guilty to voter fraud in 2016 presidential election

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By Chris Lehman | The Oregonian/OregonLive

SALEM – Ten people in Oregon have been convicted so far in voter fraud cases stemming from the 2016 election.

The convictions represent a tiny fraction of the 2,051,448 votes cast in the election, in which Oregon voters elected Democratic Gov. Kate Brown and chose Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump for president.

The Oregon Department of Justice started pursuing the cases after the Oregon Secretary of State's office forwarded 56 cases of possible voter fraud in September 2017.

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The 10 convictions represent a broad spectrum of age, party affiliation and geography. Those convicted include four Democrats, one Republican, one Libertarian and four people not affiliated with a political party.

Most of the convictions involved people who cast a ballot in two different states. Many of the cases initially involved felony charges, but all were eventually reduced to a violation.

None resulted in jail time. The maximum penalty was \$1,000 and 10 hours of community service for 45-year-old Michael Cruz of Portland.

On the low end, a judge waived a proposed \$440 fine on 40-year-old Jeremy Robbins, also of Portland. Prosecutors said Robbins cast a ballot in both Oregon and Washington.

"At the time of the election, (Robbins) was suffering from kidney infections which impacted his cognition," said Oregon Department of Justice spokeswoman Kristina Edmunson. "He does not remember voting two ballots, but acknowledges that he did and is extremely remorseful."

The most recent conviction was of Betty Clark of Haines, Oregon. Clark was 76 at the time of the election.

Her attorney, Martin Leuenberger of Baker City, said Clark had been temporarily living in Vancouver, Washington in order to care for her elderly father. While there, she received a ballot in the mail for the upcoming election, filled it out, and returned it.

Around that time, her father passed away. Clark and her husband moved back to their rural Baker County home, where there was an Oregon ballot awaiting her. "She forgot about the other one," said Leuenberger. "It was an innocent mistake. There was no criminal intent whatsoever."

Originally, Clark was charged with voting in two states, which is a felony. In an agreement with prosecutors, that charge was dropped and Clark pleaded guilty in late March to a lesser charge of "voting when not entitled." It was treated as a violation on par with a speeding ticket, and Clark was ordered to pay \$440. She did not appear in court.

Leuenberger said the reduced charge shows the lack of malicious motives on the part of his client. "Don't get me wrong," he said. "What she did was wrong, but it was a mistake. She's very embarrassed."

“She was under a lot of stress at the time because of the move and the loss of her father,” said Leuenberger, who said he’s known the family for years.

Edmunson said that sort of reduced charge is not unusual. “Generally, as long as the voter has no criminal history and has not voted from two states during the same election before, we offer a violation and fine,” she said.

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Clark was one of four retirement-age Oregonians among the 10 convicted.

The youngest was Katie Meyer of Medford. Edmunson said Meyer was an 18-year-old college student attending school in Colorado at the time of the 2016 election.

“There was a big push on campus to register to vote, which she did,” said Edmunson. “Her parents also mailed her the Oregon General Election ballot, and she received a Colorado ballot. She does not remember filling out both ballots, but acknowledges she must have.”

Edmunson said Meyer has since canceled her Colorado voter registration. She was fined \$225.

Not all of the cases involved voting in two different states. Prosecutors said Marjory Gale of Hood River cast her own ballot and that of her daughter, who was away at college.

“There was no other history of multiple voting,” said Edmunson. “Based on the circumstances, we determined that a violation was appropriate.” Gale was fined \$750.

Aside from the 10 convictions, the Department of Justice said 14 additional cases have not been resolved. The remainder were referred back to the Oregon Secretary of State’s office for possible civil violations. A spokeswoman for Secretary of State Bev Clarno said the office has not pursued violations for those cases.

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