



[Click To Go Back
To Main Page](#)

- [Page Two](#)
- [Obits](#)
- [Opinions
& Comments](#)
- [People
Humor & History](#)
- [Photo of the Day](#)
- [We Get Letters](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Columns](#)
- [Weather](#)
- [Submit News Tip](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Sunny Cal Scenes](#)
- [Wirt From
The Road](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Links](#)
- [Guest Book](#)
- [Marketplace](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Moments in Time](#)
- [Games](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Search](#)

LOGAN SHERIFF RESIGNS AFTER VOTE BUYING - "Not Enough People Left...To Carry Caskets"

(07/20/2004)

OPINION AND COMMENT - By Bob Weaver

It should come as no surprise that several southern West Virginia counties still engage in vote buying.

Logan County Sheriff Johnny "Big John" Mendez pleaded guilty Monday to buying votes and resigned his office.

His resignation came following the U.S. attorney's widening probe of election corruption in southern West Virginia.

This is the third federal investigation within 30 years of election problems in Logan County.

There should have been more.

WVOW Radio personality Speedy Bevins of Logan said one person being investigated has told him, "By the time this is all said and done there may be not be enough people left in the county to carry caskets."

West Virginia's political power has been based in the southern counties for years, from whence the shakers and movers have wielded the power and the pride in Charleston.

Sheriff Mendez pleaded guilty to two charges of conspiring to buy votes in the 2000 primary election and this year's primary election. His plea will reduce his sentence, but he may be rolling over on other political weasels.

FBI Special Agent James Wise said Mendez paid between \$10 and \$100 for votes, the most money going to heads of households who could deliver several votes.

Mendez, this go round, used \$10,000 in cash, which he then gave to others to buy votes.

Mendez bought votes for himself and an unidentified candidate for the House of Delegates.

Evidence against Mendez was collected after the investigation and conviction of Logan County Magistrate Danny R. Wells, who was convicted of taking payoffs from defendants to free them from jail.

Mendez was convicted in 1993 of paying off poll workers for \$5,000 during his 1988 campaign for magistrate. He quit the office but regained it again in 1994.

Some southern counties have had more people registered to vote than are in the county, although progress appears to have been made correcting the problem.

Hence, our prejudiced rule of thumb. Never vote for anyone south of Charleston.

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