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Pair admits guilt to voting fraud

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The Associated Press

CASPER, Wyo. (AP) — A couple has pleaded no contest to misdemeanor voter fraud for casting absentee ballots that listed a former address.

Gary and Leila Blake lived at 372 Curtis Street in Evansville before moving a few years ago to 1372 Curtis Street in Casper, about five miles away.

Last fall, the couple requested absentee ballots so they wouldn't miss hunting season. The ballots were sent to the couple's post office box.

Natrona County Clerk Mary Ann Collins said the ballots should not have been sent to the post office box. She also said the wrong address might have been mistakenly listed.

But she believes that the couple bear some responsibility.

□ They received a ballot that had Evansville Town Council and mayor on it, from their old address, so should they have said, □ Wait a minute, we don't vote in Evansville anymore, □ □ she said.

The Blakes claim that they were unaware of any problem about the ballots until their arrest Dec. 11. The charge was reduced from a felony, which would have cost them their voting rights, but they say they will never vote in the county again.

“It’s certainly proven to us that you have to have a lot of money to vote in Natrona County because you have to be willing to hire a lawyer if you’re going to vote,” Leila Blake said.

Said Gary Blake: “It’s a lesson for everybody, everybody who votes.”

The Blakes must pay fines of \$350 each and remain on unsupervised probation six months.

Just weeks before the couple’s arrest, Rep. Carolyn Paseneaux, R-Casper, pleaded guilty to one misdemeanor count of furnishing inaccurate information about her residence to the county clerk.

In exchange for Paseneaux’s guilty plea, 7th District Attorney Kevin Meenan dropped a felony charge of false voting and amended a second felony charge of false swearing to the misdemeanor charge.

Paseneaux was sentenced Nov. 22 to six months of unsupervised probation and ordered to pay a \$1,000 fine.

The Blakes say they do not know if Paseneaux’s case had anything to do with the fact they were charged, although some have suggested that.

“Our friends, the Republican Party, the (state Division of Criminal Investigation) — we weren’t hiding anything from anybody,” Leila Blake said.

“When I called and ordered a ballot, I said 1372 Curtis. The woman did not write down the one. It’s nothing like Paseneaux did. I have no idea why they treated it the same.”

Evansville Mayor Bonnie Humphrey brought the case to the attention of police. She believes the couple intentionally committed voter fraud.

□ They probably wanted somebody else to be the mayor, □ she said. □ I would venture to assume so. Why would they want to vote otherwise? □

Leila Blake said neither she nor her husband would do anything to jeopardize their hunting and fishing rights in the state.

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