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Second former Scott Taylor campaign staffer pleads guilty to election fraud



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A second member of Scott Taylor's 2018 campaign staff pleaded guilty Thursday to her role in a petition scandal that might have cost the former congressman re-election that year.

Roberta Marciano, 24, initially was charged with felony election fraud, but was allowed to plead to a misdemeanor count instead.

She received a one-year suspended jail sentence and was fined \$1,000 as part of a plea agreement. It was the same deal offered to a former co-worker earlier this year.

A third staffer is awaiting trial on similar charges.



The plea in Virginia Beach Circuit Court came as a lawyer for Taylor said this week that prosecutors have indicated he won't be facing any charges in the case.

Diane Toscano contacted the special prosecutor assigned to the investigation after he told The Virginian-Pilot earlier this month he expected to seek at least one more indictment in the case and that no one, including Taylor, had been cleared.



Toscano said Roanoke Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney John Beamer told her there's "no direct evidence implicating" Taylor in the scheme. The prosecutor also said the next indictment he plans to seek in the case will not be against Taylor, according to Toscano.

“If it was not your intent to do so, please clear this up immediately by issuing a public statement that confirms what you told me expressly.”

Beamer declined Wednesday to discuss Toscano’s claims and his boss, Roanoke Commonwealth’s Attorney Donald Caldwell, didn’t respond to an email seeking comment.

Following the plea, Taylor’s campaign issued a statement.

“Scott Taylor had no knowledge of any wrongdoing and has never been under investigation,” it read. “Those involved in any illicit behavior can and should be held accountable.”

Marciano’s attorney, Eric Plumlee, told reporters that his client was glad to finally put the proceedings behind her.

“She would like the public to know what those closest to her have known all along, that she is a woman of integrity and high moral character and that she never intended to engage in fraudulent behavior or perform any act that would compromise the integrity of the election process,” Plumlee said.

Taylor, a Republican elected to the 2nd District seat in 2016, lost his bid for a second term to Democrat Elaine Luria in 2018. He is challenging her again this year.

His 2018 campaign was rocked just a few months before the election, when allegations surfaced that several of his employees had turned in fraudulent petition signatures in an effort to get a spoiler candidate added to the ballot.

[Separate investigations by The Virginian-Pilot](#), WHRO Public Media and state Democrats showed that dozens of the signatures submitted by Taylor’s staffers in support of Independent candidate Shaun Brown had been forged. At least four of the people named were dead.

Brown ran as a Democrat against Taylor in 2016, but when she failed to win the party’s nomination in 2018 she decided to run as an independent. She needed 1,000 valid signatures to make the ballot.

Taylor conceded afterward that he knew his staff was gathering signatures to help Brown, but said he was unaware of any illegal activity relating to that effort. Brown’s campaign has said they didn’t know about it.

Before submitting the petitions, Taylor’s campaign workers had to sign a notarized affidavit in which they promised they’d witnessed all the signatures on them. They also acknowledged that failure to do so would make them guilty of a felony.

While 13 people named on documents turned in by Marciano told The Pilot that their signatures had been forged, the agreement she reached with prosecutors only says she signed off on two pages circulated by someone else and that she hadn’t witnessed the signatures on them, which is a violation of the law.

“Ms. Marciano never forged anyone’s signature, fabricated any voter profiles or did anything to supply information on any of the petitions in question,” Plumlee, the defense attorney, said.

“Rather, Ms. Marciano’s misstep was to sign several petitions which were placed in front of her. Given her youth and inexperience in the process, Ms. Marciano was naive to what was taking place and is incredibly disappointed in herself for not being more diligent in asking questions.”

Virginia Beach Commonwealth’s Attorney Colin Stolle stepped aside immediately after learning about the fraud claims, leading to the appointment of the special prosecutor.

The Roanoke Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office secured its first indictment in the case in May 2019 against [Lauren Creekmore Peabody](#). The second was issued in March against [Marciano](#) and a third was handed down earlier this month for [Heather Guillot](#).

All three were initially charged with felony election fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

[Peabody pleaded guilty](#) in March to willful neglect of an election duty, a misdemeanor. Like Marciano, she was fined \$1,000, received a one-year suspended jail sentence and was ordered to remain on good behavior for a year.

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