Written by **Kurt Hyde** on September 7, 2013

Two Sentenced in Massachusetts Vote Fraud Case

Former East Longmeadow, Massachusetts town employee Courtney Llewellyn was sentenced September 5 to one year of probation for her part in a scheme to generate fraudulent absentee ballots in a case that exposes how lax laws regarding absentee ballots make fraud relatively easy to accomplish and hard to detect.

Former East Longmeadow Selectman Enrico J. Villamaino III previously pleaded guilty to 11 charges and was sentenced to one year in the Hampden County Correctional Center plus one year of probation and 200 hours of community service. Villamaino's time in the correctional center was reduced to four months with the remainder of the one-year sentence suspended.

The guilty pleas by Villamaino and Llewellyn relate to a scheme to generate absentee ballot votes for Villamaino in the 2012 Republican primary, where he was seeking the nomination for state representative. Villamaino lost to Marie Angelides.

According to masslive.com, Hampden County prosecutor Mark Mastroianni described this crime as an "extraordinarily serious offense" when addressing Hampden Superior Court Judge Mary Lou Rup during the sentencing phase for Villamaino.

A witness told *The New American*:

> Villamaino used his influence as a selectman to get Llewellyn hired by the town clerk's office where she would have access to the voter registration database.

> Party affiliations of 285 registered Democrat voters were changed to unenrolled (independent of any party). That made these voters eligible to vote in either the Democrat or Republican Primary.

> Republican absentee primary ballots were requested for these 285 voters.

The 285 absentee ballot requests were received and processed on the same day. Villamaino and Llewellyn volunteered to take the 285 absentee ballots to the local post office to be mailed, but the witness believes the ballots were never mailed.

Quick Action Prevents the Fraud From Succeeding

When the above-average number of absentee ballot requests aroused suspicion, the East Longmeadow town clerk's office acted quickly, contacting the 285 voters in question to determine if they had requested absentee ballots and to properly process the requests for those who did and undo the absentee ballot requests for those who didn't.

The decisive action appears to have been successful. East Longmeadow Town Clerk Thomas Florence told *The New American* that to the best of his knowledge no fraudulent ballots were cast due to this

scheme. It is extremely rare for a vote fraud scheme to have been discovered after it has been initiated, and stopped before a single fraudulent ballot was cast. If this is not a first, it is at least a first in recent memory.

Increased Awareness of Electoral Fraud Leads to Increased Prosecutions

The American public has become increasingly aware of electoral fraud and people are calling for action. But how productive are the current laws against it? The penalties for being convicted are typically some combination of prison sentences, probation, and traditional community service. The time behind bars has been reduced, when appropriate, by suspended sentences.

While prison sentences may be appropriate for serious or repeat offenders, there may be a more effective alternative that will reduce electoral fraud and cost the taxpayers much less: making the penalties for first-time offenders, especially those with smaller numbers of fraudulent votes cast, misdemeanors with community service related to electoral fraud prevention.

The first phase of community service would be a videotaped reenactment of the critical steps that were used to accomplish the frauds. The public has right to know the vulnerabilities in the electoral system and this would help greatly in informing them.

For example, if the person used inside access as a government employee to generate absentee ballots using the names of inactive or phantom voters, he could be videotaped at the elections office showing exactly how he made the absentee ballot requests and how he got the ballots delivered to him rather than to the voters whose names were used.

If the person were a repeater — one who votes repeatedly in an election — he could be videotaped reenacting his appearances at different polling places.

The second phase of community service would be to participate in voter registration clean-up. One method would be going door-to-door verifying that the voters exist. In this type of community service, it would be best for the individuals doing the service and the supervisors to be in plain clothes instead of the distinctive clothing typically worn during community service.

How Secure is Absentee Balloting?

The East Longmeadow case points out the security weaknesses that have been put into absentee ballot procedures by the state legislatures. Had it not been for the conscientious town employees in East Longmeadow who became suspicious and took action, this Massachusettss fraud would have gone unnoticed.

What happened in East Longmeadow is not an isolated case. It's just one of the few that got reported. Former Chicago political insider James J. Laski, Jr. explained in his book *My Fall from Grace — From City Hall to Prison Walls* what can happen to absentee ballots once they disappear behind closed doors and are under the control of political appointees. He recounted how he was once refused a government summer job because he voted for Republican Jim Thompson for governor. His precinct captain knew how Laski voted because he was part of the ballot counting "by opening the envelopes, looking at the votes, and handing the ballots to the judges."

Laski also related how some precinct captains who assisted voters with their absentee ballots would volunteer to mark them for the voters. This was an especially effective fraud technique in nursing homes where many people with poor eyesight can't see the helper marking their ballots differently from the voters' instructions. Some precinct captains would volunteer to transport the ballots to the elections

office. On the way, they would stop at the ward office and open the absentee ballot envelopes that were marked by the voters without assistance from the precinct captain to see how they voted. Some precinct captains would not only violate the secret ballot, but would also alter the ballots in case the voters voted "wrong."

What Can Be Done to Improve Security in Absentee Balloting?

One obvious change that should be implemented is to restore traditional public access to the entire voting process including absentee ballots. Processing absentee ballot requests as well as counting them, should be done during business hours with public access to observe. Another improvement would be to restore the requirement that absentee ballot requests require a reason, such as being out of town on business or vacation on election day. Yet another would be to have elections run by cities and towns rather than by counties, as is done in most states. That would put the process closer to the people and make it easier for them to monitor and take decisive action.

The East Longmeadow case also serves as a wake-up call to those states that have adopted universal absentee balloting or are considering doing so. Such a system opens the floodgates to fraud far beyond what was attempted in East Longmeadow. The voters need to make it an issue to repeal all state laws establishing universal absentee balloting and reestablish precinct voting with public access restored to monitor the electoral process.

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