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More voter fraud indictments in Virginia?

By Tasha Kates

LOUISA — Accusations of voter fraud might be made elsewhere in Virginia after two people were indicted in Louisa County in connection with the 2008 presidential election.

Tom Garrett, Louisa commonwealth's attorney, said Thursday that authorities "from Lynchburg to Hampton Roads" have contacted him as they conduct their own investigations. Garrett said Louisa could see more voter fraud indictments, but not anytime soon.

"I will not tell you there will be further indictments in the immediate future, but I anticipate we'll continue to work with the registrar to make sure the voting process is unadulterated," Garrett said.

A Louisa grand jury last month indicted 57-year-old Bonnie R. Nicholson and 55-year old Bernard L. Pace on charges of illegal voting on Nov. 4, 2008, and election fraud, forgery and uttering charges on different days. Within the last week, both Louisa resident Nicholson and Madison resident Pace turned themselves in to authorities.

Under Virginia code, "illegal voting" encompasses several actions. A person can be convicted of the Class 6 felony if he votes in more than one election in Virginia or in Virginia and another state, "procures, assists or induces" someone to do so, votes knowing he isn't qualified to vote or helps someone do so.

Nicholson and Pace were charged under direct indictments and haven't been arraigned, so further specifics weren't available about what they are accused of under the illegal voting indictments. Garrett also wouldn't comment on those specifics, but he confirmed that their cases are not related.

A person convicted of illegal voting can face one to five years in prison, according to state statute.

Cristy E. Watkins, the county's registrar, said the state Board of Elections contacted her office because two people may have violated the voting laws.

The state board keeps a prohibited-voter database that includes people convicted of felonies, those declared mentally incompetent and the deceased, said Barbara Cockrell, the agency's director of operations. The database is maintained with information from the Virginia State Police and local court records.

Potential voters who submit an application can be rejected if they have been convicted of a felony, have been declared mentally incompetent or aren't U.S. citizens.

When a registered voter becomes a convicted felon, Cockrell said, the local registrar and the felon are notified.

According to court records, Nicholson turned herself in Oct. 1 and is out on a \$1,000 personal recognizance bond. She is scheduled to be arraigned Oct. 19.

She could not be reached for comment Thursday.

A court date for Pace, who turned himself in Wednesday, has not been set.

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