

On the subject of...

Creative campaign contributions

By Viki Eggers Mason



The Aberdeen Advocate

Nobody ever told me politics was a pleasant business. It isn't pretty and it isn't kind, but I had no idea how *thoroughly evil* it could actually be until I heard the testimony of the witnesses called in the matter of the April 22nd runoff election between Wilchie Clay and Cloyd Garth, the incumbent alderthug in Aberdeen's 2nd Ward.

Last week, I sat for many hours in the courtroom of the Honorable Judge Henry L. Lackey. While Judge Lackey proved himself to be a pleasant and thoughtful fellow, the testimony and the witnesses were, for the most part, stunning examples of supreme ignorance. The experience was very emotional for me—I was overcome with sorrow and shame. I was sickened. I was stunned. I was angered and I was heart broken. I had no idea how pitiful Aberdeen's situation really was until I was baptized last week in the sewage of the liars and thieves whom we have happily allowed to destroy our community.

I wish you had all been there to have your eyes opened, but

since not all of you were, I'll attempt in this space to give you a sense of what you have allowed to continue.

Let me start at the beginning. In recent issues of the *Advocate*, I've told you about the apparent voter fraud which took place in the April 22nd runoff election. I told you that Cloyd Garth employed several people to assist him in getting people to the polls. We presume these helpers were actively promoting his candidacy. Garth and his fellow Mississippi Mafioso, the Reverend Alonzo Sykes, provided the vans, the fuel to propel the vans and, shall we say, the "inspiration" for these devoted campaigners. (I have used the term Mississippi Mafia several times to refer to Garth and Sykes. Since there has been no letter asking me to refrain from describing them in these terms, I have concluded that they rather appreciate the "gangsta" image I've been painting of them. I suppose it helps in their intimidation of ignorant others. Perhaps it helps them to make offers that even nice people cannot refuse.)

Apart from the questionable reputation his representatives, (two of the campaigners stand convicted of drug charges) one might not bat an eye over Garth's capitalizing on their enthusiasm for his candidacy. This is politics, after all, and it's certainly not Sunday School. Initially, I thought it might take a "special breed" of campaigner to get this particular job done. The testimony I heard in Judge Lackey's court confirmed exactly that.

You see, a law abiding citizen would have felt compelled to make certain that the voters he/she transported to the polls to cast absentee ballots were: 1) legitimately registered; 2) qualified to vote an absentee ballot; and 3) actually aware that an election process was taking place. Under oath, neither Garth nor his helpers felt any particular need to qualify the voters they brought to the polls. None of them felt any sort of vague responsibility to maintaining the integrity of the electoral process. They were simply looking for volume. They wanted as many votes,

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Election protection

By Contributing Editor R. T. Mason

Aberdeen's city elections, which are still ongoing, have revealed problems in the election process which need to be addressed. While some of these problems are new, others have existed for many years and it is about time that some action is undertaken to solve these problems before the exceptions become the norm. Some, of course, can't be solved at a local level, but most of them can certainly be solved with some diligent planning and forethought.

The most obvious example of one of the election problems which can't be solved at a local level is a requirement for voter identification. The state must enact a law requiring voter identification so nothing can be done regarding such at a local level. Other problems, though, have local solutions, so why would we expect our legislators to pass a Voter Identification Law if we aren't willing to do our part to ensure quality elections?

During this election cycle, the following problems have been noted:

Problem # 1 - At least one person voting in person by absentee ballot at City Hall in the name of a registered voter who was incarcerated in the county jail at the time: It is my understanding that it is perfectly legal in the state of Mississippi for election officials to require voter identification in the cases of absentee balloting

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legitimate or otherwise, as they could possibly beg, buy, borrow or steal. They are “a special breed” indeed.

The testimony of “voters” (and I use this term in the loosest possible way) came from people who were completely clueless as to what they were doing or why. One man testified that he knew that challenger Wilchie Clay had been his alderman for many years. He did not know and scoffed at the very suggestion that Cloyd Garth has held the seat for the past twelve years. He was so animated in his objection to such a suggestion that the Judge was forced to remind him he was, indeed, required to keep a civil tongue in his head.

Another “voter” insisted that the election was held on an entirely different day and week than it actually was.

One witness knew he voted once, but didn’t remember casting his second ballot. He allowed that he might have gone to the polls that second time while in the throes of what my dainty grandmother would have called “brown bottle amnesia.”

Another witness wasn’t sure why he was transported to the polling place for Ward 2 when he was actually picked up at his residence in Ward 1. He simply believed the campaign workers when they told him he was expected to vote in Ward 2. They were campaign workers, why would he not believe them? Yet another announced that this, his first voting experience, was going to be his last because he is disenchanted with the system altogether.

Most of these “voters” who cast absentee ballots claimed to have planned a trip out of Aberdeen on election day or said that work would keep them from the polls. One, according to the reason checked on his application, claimed to be a member of the state legislature.

It became crystal clear in the first afternoon that the quality of the voters who were convinced, or perhaps coerced to vote for Cloyd Garth were not the sharpest tools in the shed. Once again, I suppose it takes a “special breed” of voter to want to elect somebody with Gangsta Garth’s “special” qualities.

Most distressing to me were issues around the testimony of Theresa Straughter, one of the convict campaign workers who worked for both Garth and the Very Reverend Alonzo “I’ve cloned my kids and now they live AND vote in Columbus, Southaven AND in beautiful Aberdeen, Mississippi” Sykes.

I think it takes a “very special breed” of human to take an oath “to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” and then take indecent liberties with the aforementioned truth.

Straughter and fellow convicted druggie Tony Walker, both swore that they were given no payment, nothing of value, nor promises of any such and that they did this “public service” out of gratitude for the kindnesses heaped upon them in the past by Garth. (Yawn.)

I would dearly love to have a look at the Aberdeen Public Utilities records on these two—something makes me wonder if they have ever actually paid a power bill.

If you spend any time listening to your radio scanner you know you can tune into the Power Company’s frequency (151.130) and hear which accounts are being disconnected for non-payment. Perhaps my city map is out of date, but since the 21st of April, the day before that infamous first runoff election, I have heard of no disconnects occurring in the vicinity of Ward 2. I cannot imagine that Adrian Garth, electric department head honcho, would deliberately NOT turn off services for non-payment in order to help his cousin win the race. Nevertheless, I’m continuing to monitor this situation since this kind of “reverse campaign contribution” seems to be gaining popularity in some Aberdeen neighborhoods. I’m sure that EVERYBODY in Ward 2 pays their bills on time and nobody is ever delinquent. And, in case you didn’t know, I am Elizabeth, Queen of all England.

Nor should it be forgotten that Tony Walker’s paycheck comes by virtue of his employment with the City of Aberdeen. I don’t understand why none of the attorneys bothered to ask if Walker felt obliged to support Garth and Sykes on account of the continuing kindnesses heaped upon him in the form of gainful employment? The lawyers did, however, make the point that when Jackie Benson allegedly fell afoul of Alderman Garth, he snarled threats at the (appointed) City Clerk telling her to “pack her bags,”

meaning, I guess, that she could expect to be fired for the annoying penchant she has for doing her job in a lawful way. I can’t help but wonder how they failed to make the Garth/Walker connection?

Then there is that other bothersome matter.

I once read a book called “*Why Nice Guys Fail and SOB’s Succeed in Small Business.*” One of the book’s chapters dealt with the many advantages available if you’ve had the forethought to purchase your very own judge. In the sordid world of Garth/Sykes, a key player is our dishonorable Municipal Court Jester Adrian Haynes who is appointed each year by—take a guess—the aldermen in the usual 3-2 vote!

Now, I don’t know why Alderman Garth spends so much time in Judge Haynes’ courtroom. I do not know, nor have I researched the outcome of many cases of alleged illegal activities by citizens in Aberdeen’s second ward versus any other. I do, however, notice that it is in Wards 1 and 2 where most of Aberdeen’s civil unrest and law enforcement heartburn are centered, and where Judge Haynes gets most of her customers. She also received a landslide of votes from that area when she was elected Justice Court Judge back in August. I also notice that the Garth/Sykes/Randle ticket was a big winner over in the hoods. Perhaps it’s just a co-inky-dink, but it just looks bad to me. (I suppose I’m being redundant. If you blog with us, you know I was appalled to see convicts handing out literature touting ANY candidate, least of all the Chief of Police and most especially Henry Randle in whom I’ve hitherto invested great personal friendship, trust and respect.)

Our legal system is the best one in the world. It works most of the time but, even though I suppose it’s un-American of me, I cannot bring myself to stake my financial future on what these people tell me. When convicted felons swear an oath, I somehow believe it carries no weight and I just cannot find it in me to put much stock in the words they toss around. I don’t think they have earned my trust, no matter who else may want to believe they have “paid their debt to society” and should be reinstated as perfectly dependable and productive citizens.

Perhaps I’ve developed a jaded outlook but, to me, this all stinks. I suppose it is also possible that it stinks because something is truly rotten.

Election protection

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and affidavit balloting. To do so would eliminate virtually all the problems we have had with both absentee and affidavit balloting? Why are we not doing this?

Problem # 2 - People who are registered to vote in more than one ward under the same name: This problem can't be solved immediately. The Municipal Election Commission is charged with the duty of purging and maintaining the voter rolls but, by law, such purging can't be done within 90 days of an upcoming election. This commission is supposed to consist of three members who are appointed by the Board of Aldermen. In Aberdeen, we haven't had a Municipal Election Commission for about three years. One member was appointed to this commission early last year, but resigned after no other members were appointed. Two new members were recently appointed but, unfortunately (or, fortunately, depending on your viewpoint,) the appointments were within the 90-day deadline so they could not legally purge the voter rolls.

Although this problem can't be solved immediately, surely the voter rolls can be scanned by computer to identify all registered voters with the same name, and these voters can be individually checked to determine if they are the same people.

Problem # 3 - People who are registered to vote in more than one ward under different names: Again, this problem can't be solved immediately, but if the Municipal Election Commission will reconcile the city's voter list with the county's voter list for the city, most of these duplicate names can be eliminated.

Problem # 4 - People who are registered to vote, but their address is a vacant lot: The Municipal Election Commission can easily ascertain the address at which these voters receive their mail from the U. S. Postal Service and make the adjustments necessary to ensure that they are voting in their correct wards. However, since poll workers verify the address when a voter attempts to vote, those voters who are registered with addresses that are vacant lots should be questioned, and if they still insist that their address is correct, then they should be required to vote by affidavit ballot using proper ID.

Problem # 5 - There are approximately 885 more registered voters on the city's

voter rolls than are listed on the county voter rolls for the city of Aberdeen: Surely, the computer files containing these two lists can be compared by a computer, and a list of the exceptions between the two files generated can then be evaluated and reconciled on an individual basis.

Problem # 6 - People voting by both regular and absentee ballot: Recent examples of this were the subject of last week's two-day court hearing. As I understand it, on the morning of the election before regular polling begins, the poll workers write, "voted (abt)" on the voter list beside the name of each voter who has voted by absentee ballot. If someone approaches the polling desk and asks to vote, the poll worker asks for the voter's name, and looks it up on the voter list. If the list indicates that the voter has already voted by absentee ballot, the voter should be challenged. The voter may be allowed to vote again in a regular polling ballot, but the poll workers must throw out that voter's absentee ballot. To avoid errors, the absentee ballot envelopes and the accompanying absentee ballots should be kept together until the election is completed so that particular ballots can still be identified, if necessary as was (or wasn't) the case of the runoff election in Ward 2.

Problem # 7 - Candidate poll watchers "assisting" voters in the voting booth: Each candidate is allowed to have a poll watcher in the polling place at all times, and voters are certainly allowed, by law, to have assistance in the voting booth if they wish. Within reason, such assistance can come from anyone whom the voter desires. However, campaign workers and poll watchers of any candidate are strictly prohibited from assisting voters in the voting booth. Election law specifically states that no poll watchers are allowed within a space of 30 feet, in all directions, of the voting booths. Poll watchers are not to impede the voting traffic, but they should be allowed *seating* (not milling about) within a distance short enough that will allow them to hear voter's names being called in order that they may have the opportunity to challenge any particular voter. Neither poll watchers nor candidates should be in a position which would permit any other type of conversation or communication between candidates' representatives and the voters. It is entirely the responsibility of the Poll Manager to ensure that these procedures are employed, without exception.

Problem # 8 - People voting in a ward in which they do not live: Once again, this is a case where the Municipal Election Commission should work closely with the U. S. Postal Service in order to ascertain that voters continue to live at the addresses at which they are registered. To be sure, there are a few exceptions which might allow voters to vote when they do not physically reside at their registered addresses. These exceptions involve temporary residency at another location, such as a student temporarily living in the town of a college which he/she attends. However, in these situations, investigations should be made to ensure that these voters are not also voting at their temporary residence in another city, county or state.

Finally, in order to ensure an unbiased election, poll managers and poll workers should be rotated between the polling places so that the same poll manager and poll workers are not working the same polling place for the primary, runoff or general election. Ideally, poll managers and poll workers should meet at City Hall on the morning of Election Day where they each receive their polling assignments which would be chosen at random from the list of managers and workers.

Why did these problems exist? The Board of Aldermen knew for years that we needed a Municipal Election Commission. They also knew that the voter rolls couldn't be purged within 90 days before an election. Why didn't they appoint such a commission? Was it a lack of applications for the position? Possibly. But, if they had no applications for the position, then why did they not advertise for applications? Could it have anything to do with the fact that every member of the Board of Aldermen planned on seeking re-election? Who knows?

Then again, the Democratic Executive Committee was presented with a list of anticipated problems, including most of those listed above, BEFORE the primary election. For reasons known only to them, they chose to do nothing to prevent these problems, such as not requiring voter identification for all absentee and affidavit balloting. Why not? Who knows?

After they were made aware of problems existing in the polling places of Wards 1 and 2 in the primary elections, why didn't they rotate the poll managers and poll workers to and from other wards to help ensure that the same problems did not again occur in the runoff election? Who knows?

The Board of Aldermen, the Municipal Election Commission and the Democratic Executive Committee were totally unprepared for this election! I sincerely hope that these leaders will begin now to correct these problems so we are not plagued with them in future elections.



The Aberdeen Advocate

112 EAST WASHINGTON STREET
ABERDEEN, MS 39730
662.369.0449

Email: AberdeenAdvocate@bellsouth.net
viki@vikimason.com



Hey!
YOU!

**The voting booth
is just
the beginning!**

The Aberdeen Advocate is committed to the goal of improving the quality of life in Aberdeen and Monroe County by identifying and exposing waste and mismanagement in Government. To these ends we humbly offer our observations and opinions.

“Ours is a government of checks and balances. The Mafia and the crooked businessmen make out the checks and the politicians and other crooked officials improve their bank balances.”

...Steve Allen

- ### Your City Officials
- Mayor
Honorable Jim Ballard
369-4165
 - Chief of Police
Henry Randle
369-6454
 - Alderman, Ward 1
Alonzo Sykes
369-7705
 - Alderman Ward 2 (Temporary)
Cloyd Garth
369-5734
 - Alderman, Ward 3
David Ewing
319-7652
 - Alderman, Ward 4
Randy Nichols
369-3352
 - Alderman, Ward 5
John Allen
369-4683