Uncovering Voter Frauds in a Senate Election

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The Senate is finally facing up to the biggest of all the many scandals about last November's elections: the stuffing of the ballot box with fraudulent and paid "votes." The Senate Rules Committee just ordered a full investigation of Mary Landrieu's narrow 5,788-vote victory over Woody Jenkins for U.S. Senator from Louisiana.

An election can be overturned in two ways. The loser must show either that, vote-by-vote, there were more illegal votes cast than the margin of difference between the two candidates, or that widespread corruption, fraud and illegality so tainted the election that it cannot be determined who won.

Woody Jenkins has amassed enough evidence on both counts to persuade the Senate Rules Committee to proceed with an investigation.

Phantom votes are "votes" for which there is no paper trail to verify that they were legally cast. Jenkins has identified seven types of phantom votes, such as voting machine counters showing more votes than there are names of eligible voters on the poll list.

Other phantom votes appear when persons are allowed to vote without signing the voter registration application (obviously, with the connivance of the precinct commissioner). Still others occur when the signature on the application does not match the signature of the person on the precinct register.

With the help of a thousand volunteers, and despite obstructionism from local politicians, Jenkins has already found 7,454 phantom votes that were counted in the November 5 election. He expects precinct audits conducted by Senate investigators, with power to subpoena records from courthouses, to uncover thousands more.

Senate investigators will also look into the activities of the Louisiana Independent Federation of Electors (L.I.F.E.), the political machine run for the last 30 years by New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial and his father, former Mayor Ernest "Dutch" Morial. L.I.F.E. raises and spends large sums of money, including corporate funds, in behalf of federal, state and local candidates, but has never registered or filed campaign

finance reports with the Federal Election Commission or the Louisiana State Ethics Board.

Jenkins has produced evidence that more than 200 city employees were forced to campaign for Morial's candidates, including Mary Landrieu. Lists posted at City Hall directed city employees by name where to report for their campaign duties.

On election day, hundreds of rented vans and buses hauled people to vote for Mary Landrieu, in violation of Louisiana's Anti-Vote Hauling Act. Some of these vehicles transported people from one precinct to another to enable them to vote multiple times.

Jenkins has uncovered evidence that an organized effort to buy votes involved a network of drivers, large amounts of cash, and experienced supervisors. Jenkins has audio tapes of interviews with persons who admit to having voted multiple times for Mary Landrieu and with drivers who admit to facilitating this fraud.

The tape recordings, which have been provided to Senate investigators, contain shocking admissions. "I voted 10, 15 times." "I was the driver of the van, picking up the people to go down there to vote at least 10 times or more." "I made about $700 that day, starting at about 6 that morning to about 6:30 that evening." "I voted about 10, 15 times . . . They kept letting me go back and vote."

Jenkins has uncovered some of the shenanigans caused by the Motor Voter Act. Thousands who registered and voted gave their addresses as public housing units that have been abandoned.

Another area of corruption involved illegal corporate contributions from Louisiana gambling interests. Harrah's Jazz, a casino in bankruptcy, spent more than $1 million on election day to support gambling initiatives, including the hiring of at least 900 workers in New Orleans who passed out sample ballots for L.I.F.E.-endorsed candidates including Mary Landrieu.

Federal law permits corporations to contribute so-called soft money to state political parties to finance legitimate "party building" activities, such as sample ballots listing all Democratic candidates with the slogan "Vote Democratic." However, the Louisiana Democratic Party hired 3,000 election-day workers in New Orleans who distributed the L.I.F.E. ballot endorsing Mary Landrieu, something the law does not permit.

Jenkins even uncovered hanky-panky about the voting machines. Although state law requires that machines be opened only in the presence of the candidates' representatives, 877 voting machines were already opened before Jenkins representatives were allowed to inspect them.

Louisiana has a long history of vote fraud. In 1975, 37 election commissioners and a sitting Congressman, Rick Tonry, went to federal prison for vote buying and other illegalities. November 5, 1996 was unprecedented even by Louisiana standards.

It is rare for anyone to go to prison for election frauds, even though illegalities are widespread. Usually, the local politicians are able to get a voter-fraud challenge heard by a partisan local judge who throws it out on technicalities. Due to the wisdom of our Founding Fathers, the U.S. Constitution provides that the Senate is "the judge of the elections, returns and qualifications of its own members."

The U.S. Constitution gives Americans a chance for honest federal elections, and gives Woody Jenkins a chance to claim his Senate seat.