

Original Story URL:

<http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=350401>

Editorial: State GOP should apologize

From the Journal Sentinel

Posted: Aug. 23, 2005

As if the gargantuan mess that was last November's election in Milwaukee wasn't bad enough, the Wisconsin Republican Party has been painting it as even more dire than it actually was. This campaign of hype crossed the line of decency two weeks ago, however, when it sullied the reputation of an innocent person, who now deserves an apology.

GOP Chairman Rick Graber and two Republican lawmakers - Rep. Jeff Stone of Greendale and Sen. Joe Leibham of Sheboygan - staged a news conference Aug. 9 outside a home in the 1600 block of N. Astor St. to announce it had sent to authorities evidence that at least nine people who voted in Milwaukee in November also cast ballots in other cities, including Chicago and Minneapolis.

The politicians didn't release names, but their presence implicated the private home that formed the news conference backdrop. A couple, Stuart and Gayle Schenk, live there, and until last August, their son Joseph did, too. He moved to Chicago to study to join the Franciscan order of the Roman Catholic Church.

The GOP trio was essentially implying that this seminarian was a cheat. The other day, however, U.S. Attorney Steven Biskupic, a Republican appointee, announced that an investigation into the nine cases uncovered zero evidence of fraud. The authorities found only clerical errors and inconsistencies.

The party owes the younger Schenk an apology. It was wrong to have besmirched his name for the sake of political gain: namely, adoption of a measure that would tighten voter ID requirements so much that Wisconsin would boast the most rigid rules in the nation. Tighter rules tend to help the GOP by suppressing Democratic votes.

Rick Wiley, executive director of the state Republican Party, told a Journal Sentinel reporter that, prior to the news conference, the party had sent the authorities 49 names of people suspected of double-voting in the city and that the authorities had cleared 48 - a track record that should have told party officials the chances are that Joseph Schenk was innocent, too.

The party is letting ambition get the best of it. Bureaucratic meltdown most logically explains the mess here in November. Mayor Tom Barrett believes long lines and other snafus suppressed far more votes than the amount cast illegally. He's likely right.

But the GOP has been screaming voter fraud. The authorities have indeed uncovered spotty evidence of fraud, none of which has yet been shown to be preventable with a tighter voter ID rule, which, for instance, won't stop felons who give their correct names from casting ballots. Yet, the GOP cites felons' voting and other non-germane problems as a reason for tightening ID requirements.

The GOP went too far, however, when it besmirched an innocent man for partisan gain.

[Buy a link here](#)

From the Aug. 24, 2005 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
Have an opinion on this story? [Write a letter to the editor.](#)

Don't miss one more day of local news and money-saving offers! [Subscribe Today!](#)