

Democrats silent on possible ballot tampering in South Carolina primaries

Jeff Lassahn
15 June 2010

Many questions have emerged about the bizarre results of a June 8 Democratic primary election for one of South Carolina's US Senate seats. The expected winner was Vic Rawl, an establishment Democratic Party figure who has served as a South Carolina congressman and judge. Instead, 59 percent of the vote went to Alvin Greene, an unemployed military veteran who ran a minimal campaign.

The controversy surrounding the election results has focused heavily on the peculiarities of Greene as a candidate. Little mention, however, has been made of the voting process itself, which involved the use of electronic ballot machines that leave no paper trail and have been outlawed in other states because they are vulnerable to hacking and manipulation.

While Democratic Party officials have charged Greene is a Republican "plant," they have avoided any suggestions that the results were fabricated. To do so would call into question other controversial results, including the 2004 presidential race, and the legitimacy of the US election system as a whole.

Alvin Greene lives in the small town of Manning, South Carolina, and after graduating with a degree in political science of the University of South Carolina, he served in the Air Force and Army National Guard. He has been unemployed since an involuntary honorable discharge from the military in 2009 and has no record of a public political position.

In the context of widespread hostility to the Democratic and Republican parties, their failure to address unemployment, the Gulf oil spill, and continuing wars in the Middle East, it is not implausible that Greene's *lack* of affiliation with the political system could bring him popular support. Yet his candidacy was quite a mystery. After the election, the media scrambled to even find out who he was. He

had no campaign website, TV or radio ads, lawn signs, or published speeches.

In interviews after his primary win, Greene also stated that he never held any official campaign events or even a fundraiser, nor did he attend any Democratic events or rallies. Pressed repeatedly about how he even reached people, he stated it was "simple, old fashioned campaigning" of going door-to-door all across the state. In total, he spent "less than \$2,000" on campaigning for the primary election.

In contrast, Walter Ludwig, the campaign manager of defeated candidate Vic Rawl, noted that the Rawl campaign applied the typical techniques of a multimillion-dollar American election campaign, using a quarter-million robocalls, sending 300,000 e-mails, and driving nearly 17,000 miles to campaign events statewide.

Along with the mysterious campaign, Alvin Greene has provided very little information on his own political views. Responding to accusations that he is a Republican plant, he stated he is "a lifelong Democrat." Otherwise, Greene has provided only generic comments on issues, and so far has no campaign literature or website to confirm these views.

The media treatment of Greene has ranged from frustrated to offensive. Anchors from Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC all became visibly annoyed when interviewing Greene over his simple answers and simple explanations of how he beat a well-funded candidate. Greene himself seems curiously hesitant and restrained in interviews, to which CNN's Don Lemon contemptuously asked, "You're mentally sound, physically sound, you're not impaired by anything at this moment?"

Despite this, in the primary Greene gathered 100,000 votes statewide compared to 70,000 for Vic Rawl.

Among the fairly implausible explanations for his victory are by being number one on the ballot he gathered more votes, his name was associated with popular soul singer Al Green, or that “Greene,” as a popular African-American surname, gave him a boost in name recognition.

So far, the only investigation of voting irregularities has been conducted by volunteer analysts on behalf of Vic Rawl. His campaign manager Walter Ludwig reports that in Spartanburg County, there are 25 precincts where Greene obtained more votes than cast, and another 50 where votes are missing from the final tally. In Lancaster County, Rawl won 84 percent of absentee ballots, but Greene obtained 67 percent of the votes on Election Day. Of 46 counties in the state, 10 have a disparity greater than 10 percentage points between Election Day and absentee ballots. In one seventh of precincts statewide, Greene won 75 percent or more of the votes, which is higher than many incumbents achieve.

The primary reportedly used paperless Election Systems & Software voting machines. Technology and public policy blog Techdirt provides this summary of ES&S machine problems: “ES&S machines have lost votes in Florida. The company gave California machines that were not certified. In one election ES&S gave the vote tallies to a totally different election. People using ES&S machines have found that they voted for the wrong candidate.

“It’s also quite easy for anyone to recalibrate certain ES&S machines, so that it’s easier for people to make mistakes while voting. In South Dakota, ES&S machines added thousands of phantom votes. And then there’s Kentucky, where officials were recently arrested for using the confusing interface of ES&S e-voting machines to get people to leave the polling place before submitting their votes, so those officials could change their votes.”

On Monday, Rawl filed a formal protest challenging the results, saying he has heard from numerous voters and poll workers who reported “extremely unusual incidents” during the June 8 election. “These range from voters who repeatedly pushed the screen for me only to have the other candidates’ names appear, to poll workers who had to change program cards multiple times to at least one voter in the Republican primary who had the Democrat US Senate race appear on her

ballot.”

He added, “It is worth noting that these machines were purchased surplus from Louisiana after that state outlawed them. These are touch-screen computer-operated voter machines. There is no independent paper back up for any of them.”

In general, however, the Democratic Party has avoided any mention of the damning record of voting machines and the possibility that the election was rigged. Instead, state Democrats have seized on news that Greene faces a felony obscenity charge for showing a pornographic image to a University of South Carolina student, and asked him to resign, while refraining from commenting on the voting results.

Democratic South Carolina Representative Clyburn suggested Greene was a plant. There is no question the Republicans stand to benefit from a discredited Democratic candidate. It is also unclear whether Greene, who holds a degree in political science and worked for military intelligence, is deliberately misrepresenting himself.

On Sunday, senior White House advisor David Axelrod stated casually that “how [Greene] won the primary is a big mystery, and until you resolve that I don’t think he can claim to be a strong, credible candidate.” Axelrod made no clear demand for an investigation into voting irregularities, despite the upcoming national elections in November.

How Greene obtained such a large margin of victory is unresolved, but the reported vote totals from the ES&S electronic voting machines warrant an independent investigation. If they were tampered with or malfunctioned, it would only be the most recent example of voting irregularities in the United States. In case after case, from the theft of 2000 elections to the disputed results in Ohio and other states that returned Bush to the White House, the Democratic Party has opposed any serious fight against the trampling on voting rights.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact