

Virginia Gov. Pardons 60,000 Felons, Enough to Swing Election

Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe has granted voting rights to as many as 60,000 convicted felons just in time for them to register to vote, nearly five times more than previously reported and enough to win the state for his long-time friend, Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton.

McAuliffe sought to allow all of Virginia's estimated 200,000 felons to vote, but state courts said each individual felon's circumstances must be weighed. To get around that, McAuliffe used a mechanical autopen to rapidly sign thousands of letters, as if he had personally reviewed them, even as his office was saying the total was 13,000.

Now, The Daily Caller News Foundation Investigative Group has learned that McAuliffe—who managed Clinton's unsuccessful 2008 presidential campaign—churned out five times as many letters before the registration deadline than publicly claimed.

Virginia's recent political history has seen multiple races that were decided by tiny margins. The 2014 U.S. Senate race, for example, was decided by only 17,000 votes, while the attorney general's race came down to a mere 165 votes.

McAuliffe is a close friend of Hillary and former President Bill Clinton, even personally guaranteeing a loan for the purchase of their Chappaqua, New York, mansion in 1999. He also served as chairman of the Democratic National Committee where he was a prodigious fund raiser.

The Virginia chief executive claimed to have “no idea” how felons would vote and said he had never thought about it. Clinton's staff emailed him after the 200,000-voters move to

call it a "great announcement" and set up a call about it.

McAuliffe also did a major favor for the wife of a senior FBI executive who was running for a Virginia legislative seat at the same time the bureau was investigating Clinton's use of private email addresses and a home-brew server to conduct the official diplomatic business of the U.S.

Virginia officials expressed surprise that McAuliffe had signed so many more letters than previously reported. Registrars and state legislators told TheDCNF they had no idea, and even officers of the state Board of Elections were kept in the dark.

Registrars could look up a felon's status one name at a time in a Secretary of the Commonwealth database, if they had his or her Social Security number, but the system didn't display the total number of those restored.

Lashawnda S. Singleton, spokesman for Virginia's Secretary of the Commonwealth, did not respond to TheDCNF's request for the data.

After TheDCNF asked Clara Belle Wheeler, vice-chairman of the Virginia Board of Elections and a Republican, she was told by Edgardo Cortes, Commissioner of the Department of Elections, that the total was somewhere between 50,000 and 60,000.

"Cortes stated that the names were available to the general registrars thru the Secretary of the Commonwealth's website. He stated that the number was between 50 and 60,000 names. He was unable to be more precise," Wheeler told TheDCNF.

"He assured me that the entire 216,000 felons were not sent voter registration cards. He stated that only those who had completed voter registration forms which were submitted to the general registrars either in paper forms or via the on-line citizen portal were registered to vote. He did not know the number of felons whose rights had been restored who have

registered to vote," she said.

Those who received McAuliffe's letter also got voter registration forms with pre-paid return postage. No others in Virginia received such a service.

When TheDCNF pointed out that 60,000 could tip an election, Wheeler said "I am acutely and chronically aware of that." She also noted that McAuliffe has explicitly asked felons to vote for Clinton.

Wheeler said the last-minute, highly unorthodox flood of individual restorations had to be processed by registrars who were already overwhelmed by failing computer systems.

She also said that, while McAuliffe claimed to only be restoring voting rights of felons who had completed their sentences, his use of the autopen might not satisfy the court's specific vetting requirement.

"I think the General Assembly caucus that brought suit made it abundantly clear that you must look at each person and evaluate each individual person's record: have they served their time, have they paid their restoration if it was due, have they finished their probation, are they citizens, have they not been arrested for some other crime," Wheeler said.

"The code of Virginia requires that each person is treated as an individual rather than as a bulk because each individual has a different set of circumstances and those should be evaluated," she said. {eoa}

This article originally appeared on The Daily Caller.