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EDITORIALS

Getting beyond the fraud

Before Indiana GOP officials bluster on too long about how dirty the Indiana Democratic Party's kettle is when it comes to election fraud, they should keep in mind their own record.

On Thursday, state GOP Chairman Eric Holcomb sent out a caustic fund- raising email to party faithful saying "Election fraud is alive and well within the Indiana Democratic Party" and suggesting a donation to the Republican Party "will help ensure the integrity of our electoral process."

Holcomb's email referred to the case of a former state representative and longtime Jennings County Democratic Party worker, Michael Marshall, who was sentenced last Wednesday to serve jail time for absentee ballot fraud. It also mentioned the recent convictions of several election workers in St. Joseph County. They forged signatures on petitions to place Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton on the 2008 primary ballot.

On Wednesday, Indiana Secretary of State Connie Lawson, the state's chief election official, sent out a news release lauding the General Assembly's passage of legislation affecting voting and elections and described the changes as "the most sweeping election integrity reforms since photo ID."

Of course, Indiana's questionable voter ID law fails to address concerns about absentee ballot fraud – where the greatest opportunity for election tampering exists.

"Lawson developed legislation to increase the security and the integrity of our state's elections. Her initiatives include residency clarifications, county clerk-recommended reforms to streamline election administration, increased security for voter registration records and mandatory voter list maintenance," the release said.

Lawson, a Republican, also referred to the same instances of election fraud as Holcomb as proof that reform was needed. She also singled out several Republican lawmakers for their help in making the changes.

But her praise of the election law changes fails to acknowledge that it was former Indiana Secretary of State Charlie White's conviction for voter fraud and other felonies that led to Lawson's appointment by former Gov. Mitch Daniels.

The recent study by the Pew Charitable Trusts and Massachusetts Institute of Technology gave Indiana low marks for its election performance.

The Pew study showed that Indiana needs to address the large number of voter registration applications that are rejected. Indiana also needs to do a better job of tracking absentee ballots. The state ranked just below Washington, D.C., for the large number of absentee ballots that are sent out but not returned.

Susan K. Urahn, executive vice president of the Pew Charitable Trusts, noted in an article for governing.com that those states that performed best on Pew's study were those that took a bipartisan approach to improving voting and election procedures.

Indiana political officials – from both parties – would do well to consider Urahn's advice.

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