



MONTE WOLVERTON

DID 308,000 CANCELED OHIO VOTER REGISTRATIONS PUT BUSH BACK IN THE WHITE HOUSE?

BY BOB FITRAKIS & HARVEY WASSERMAN

While life goes on during the Bush 2 nightmare, so does the research on what really happened in Ohio in 2004 to give George W. Bush a second term.

Pundits throughout the state and nation — many of them alleged Democrats — continue to tell those of us who question Bush's second coming that we should "get over it," that the election is old news.

But things get curiouser and curiouser.

In our 2005 compendium *How the GOP Stole Ohio's 2004 Election & Is Rigging 2008*, we list more than a hundred ways the Republican Party denied the democratic process in the Buckeye State. For a book of documents to be published September 11 by the New Press entitled *What Happened in Ohio?*, we are continuing to dig.

It turns out, we missed more than a few of the dirty tricks Karl Rove, Ken Blackwell, and their GOP used to get themselves four more years. In an election won with death by a thousand cuts, some that are still hidden go very deep.

One of them has just surfaced to the staggering tune of 175,000 purged voters in Cuyahoga County (Cleveland), the traditional stronghold of the Ohio Democratic Party. An additional 10,000 that registered to vote there for the 2004 election were lost due to "clerical error."

As we reported more than a year ago, some 133,000 voters were purged from the registration rolls in Hamilton County (Cincinnati) and Lucas County (Toledo) between 2000 and 2004. The 105,000 from Cincinnati and 28,000 from Toledo exceeded Bush's official alleged margin of victory — just under 119,000 votes out of some 5.6 million the Republican Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell deemed worth counting.

Exit polls flashed worldwide on CNN at 12:20 a.m. Wednesday morning, November 3, showed John Kerry winning Ohio by 4.2% of the popular vote, probably about 250,000 votes. We believe this is an accurate reflection of what really happened in Ohio.

But by morning Bush was being handed the Presidency, claiming a 2.5% Buckeye victory, as certified by Blackwell. In conjunction with other exit polling, the lead switch from Kerry to Bush is a virtual statistical impossibility. Yet John Kerry conceded with more than 250,000 ballots still uncounted, though Bush at the time was allegedly ahead only by 138,000, a margin that slipped to less than 119,000 in the official vote count.

At the time, very few people knew about those 133,000 voters who had been eliminated from the registration rolls in Cincinnati and Toledo. County election boards purged the voting registration lists. Though Ohio election boards are allegedly bipartisan, in fact they are all controlled by the Republican Party. Each has four seats, filled by law with two Democrats and two Republicans.

But all tie votes are decided by the Secretary of State, in this case Blackwell, the extreme rightwing Republican now running for governor. Blackwell served in 2004 not only as the man in charge of the state's vote count, but also as a co-chair of the Ohio Bush-Cheney campaign. Many independent observers have deemed this to be a conflict of interest. On election day, Blackwell met personally with Bush, Karl Rove, and Matt Damschroder, chair of the Franklin County (Columbus) Board of Elections, formerly the chair of the county's Republican Party.

The Board of Elections in Toledo was chaired by Bernadette Noe, wife of Tom Noe, northwestern Ohio's "Mr. Republican." A close personal confidante of the Bush family, Noe raised more than \$100,000 for the GOP presidential campaign in 2004. He is currently under indictment for three felony violations of federal election law, and 53 counts of fraud, theft and other felonies in the "disappearance" of more than \$13 million in state funds. Noe was entrusted with investing those funds by Republican Governor Robert Taft, who recently pled guilty to four misdemeanor charges, making him the only convicted criminal to serve as governor of Ohio.

The rationale given by Noe and by the Republican-controlled Board of Elections in Lucas and Hamilton Counties was the voters should be eliminated from the rolls because they had allegedly not voted in the previous two federal elections.

There is no law that requires such voters be eliminated. And no public verification has been offered to confirm that these people had not, in fact, voted in those elections.

Nonetheless, tens of thousands of voters turned up in mostly Democratic wards in Cincinnati and Toledo, only to find they had been mysteriously removed from the voter rolls. In

many cases, sworn testimony and affidavits given at hearings after the election confirmed that many of these citizens had in fact voted in the previous two federal elections and had not moved from where they were registered. In some cases, their stability at those addresses stretched back for decades.

The problem was partially confirmed by a doubling of provisional ballots cast during the 2004 election, as opposed to the number cast in 2000. Provisional ballots have been traditionally used in Ohio as a stopgap for people whose voting procedures are somehow compromised at the polls, but who are nonetheless valid registrants.

Prior to the 2004 election, Blackwell made a range of unilateral pronouncements that threw the provisional balloting process into chaos. Among other things, he demanded voters casting provisional ballots provide their birthdates, a requirement that was not often mentioned by poll workers. Eyewitnesses testify that many provisional ballots were merely tossed in the trash at Ohio polling stations.

To this day, more than 16,000 provisional ballots (along with more than 90,000 machine-spoiled ballots) cast in Ohio remain uncounted. The Secretary of State refuses to explain why. A third attempt by the Green and Libertarian Parties to obtain a meaningful recount of the Ohio presidential vote has again been denied by the courts, though the parties are appealing.

Soon after the 2004 election, Damschroder announced that Franklin County would eliminate another 170,000 citizens from the voter rolls in Columbus. Furthermore, House Bill 3, recently passed by the GOP-dominated legislature, has imposed a series of restrictions that will make it much harder for citizens to restore themselves to the voter rolls, or to register in the first place.

All this, however, pales before a new revelation just released by the Board of Elections in Cuyahoga County, the heavily Democratic county surrounding Cleveland.

Robert J. Bennett, the Republican chair of the Cuyahoga Board of Elections, and the Chair of the Ohio Republican Party, has confirmed that prior to the 2004 election, his Board of Elections eliminated — with no public notice — a staggering 175,414 voters from the Cleveland-area registration rolls. He has not explained why the revelation of this massive registration purge

has been kept secret for so long. Virtually no Ohio or national media has bothered to report on this story.

Many of the affected precincts in Cuyahoga County went 90% and more for John Kerry. The county overall went more than 60% for Kerry.

The eliminations have been given credence by repeated sworn testimony and affidavits from long-time Cleveland voters that they came to their usual pooling stations only to be told that they were not registered. When they could get them, many were forced to cast provisional ballots which were highly likely to be pitched in the trash, or which remain uncounted.

Ohio election history would indicate that the elimination of 175,000 voters in heavily Democratic Cleveland must almost certainly spell doom for any statewide Democratic campaign. These 175,000 pre-2004 election eliminations must now be added to the 105,000 from Cincinnati and the 28,000 from Toledo.

Therefore, to put it simply: at least 308,000 voters, most of them likely Democrats, were eliminated from the registration rolls prior to an election allegedly won by less than 119,000 votes, where more than 106,000 votes still remain uncounted, and where the GOP Secretary of State continues to successfully fight off a meaningful recount.

There are more than 80 other Ohio counties where additional pre-November 2004 mass eliminations by GOP-controlled boards of election may have occurred. Further "anomalies" in the Ohio 2004 vote count continue to surface.

In addition, it seems evident that the Democratic Party will now enter Ohio's 2006 gubernatorial and U.S. Senate races, and 2008 presidential contest, with close to a half-million voters eliminated from the registration rolls, the vast majority of them from traditional Democratic strongholds, and with serious legislative barriers having been erected against new voter registration drives.

Bob Fittrakis and Harvey Wasserman are co-authors of *How the GOP Stole America's 2004 Election & Is Rigging 2008*. They are co-editors, with Steve Rosenfeld, of *What Happened in Ohio?* forthcoming in September from the New Press. They wrote this article for *The Columbus Free Press* (Ohio), assisted with research by Dr. Richard Hayes Philips, Dr. Norm Robbins and Dr. Victoria Lovegren.

RAISING THE ISSUE OF IMPEACHMENT

BY JOHN NICHOLS

As President Bush and his aides scramble to explain new revelations regarding Bush's authorization of spying on the international telephone calls and e-mails of Americans, the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, has begun a process that could lead to the censure, and perhaps impeachment of the President and Vice President.

U.S. Representative John Conyers, the Michigan Democrat who was a critical player in the Watergate and Iran-Contra investigations into Presidential wrongdoing, has introduced a package of resolutions that would censure President Bush and Vice President Cheney and create a select committee to investigate the administration's possible crimes and make recommendations regarding grounds for impeachment.

The Conyers resolutions add a significant new twist to the debate about how to hold the administration to account.

The first of the three resolutions introduced by Conyers, House Resolution 635, asks that Congress establish a select committee to investigate whether members of the administration made moves to invade Iraq before receiving Congressional authorization, manipulated pre-war intelligence, encouraged the use of torture in Iraq and elsewhere, and used their positions to retaliate against critics of the war.

The select committee would be asked to make recommendations regarding grounds for possible impeachment of Bush and Cheney.

The second resolution, H.R. 636, asks that Congress censure the President "for failing to respond to requests for information concerning allegations that he and others of his administration misled Congress and the American people regarding the decision to go to war in Iraq, misstated and manipulated the intelligence information regarding the justification for the war, countenanced torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of persons in Iraq, and permitted inappropriate retaliation against critics of his administration, for failing to adequately account for specific misstatements he made regarding the war, and for failing to comply with Executive Order 12958." (This executive order, issued in 1995 by President Bill Clinton, seeks to promote openness in government by prescribing a uniform system for classifying, safeguarding, and declassifying national security information. The administration has secretly classified

and reclassified thousands of government documents in flagrant violation of E.O. 12958.)

A third resolution, H.R. 637, would censure Cheney for a similar set of complaints.

It is unlikely the effort to censure Bush and Cheney, let alone impeach them, will get far without significant organizing around the country. After all, the House is controlled by allies of the President who have displayed no inclination to hold him to account. Indeed, only a few Democrats, such as Conyers, have taken seriously the Constitutional issues raised by the administration's misdeeds.

Members of Congress in both parties will need to feel a lot of heat if these important measures are going to get much traction in this Congress.

Progressive Democrats of America, a grassroots group that has had a good deal of success organizing activists who want the Party to take a more aggressive stance challenging the administration, will play a critical role in the effort to mobilize support for the Conyers resolutions, as part of a new Censure Bush Coalition Campaign. (The campaign's website can be found at www.censurebush.org)

Getting this Congress to get serious about maintaining checks and balances on the Bush administration will be a daunting task. But the recent revelations regarding domestic spying will make it easier. There are a lot of Americans who share the view of U.S. Senator Russ Feingold, Democrat of Wisconsin, that Bush and Cheney have exceeded their authority. As Feingold says of Bush, "He is the President, not a king."

The bitter experience of dealing with King George III led the founders of this country to write a Constitution that empowers Congress to hold Presidents and Vice Presidents accountable for their actions.

It is this power that John Conyers, the senior member of the House committee charged with maintaining the system of checks and balances established by those founders, is now asking the Congress to employ in the service of the nation that Constitution still governs.

This article is excerpted from *The Nation*. John Nichols is author of *The Rise & Rise of Richard B. Cheney: Unlocking the Mysteries of the Most Powerful Vice President in American History* (The New Press, 2005).

AVAGALLERY

ASTORIA VISUAL ARTS
160 10TH ST., ASTORIA
BACK ON THE BLOCK 2 DOORS DOWN