

## ***Black Box Voting***

### **Ohio governor's ethics violations expose money trail to stolen 2004 election**

**By Bob Fitrakis & Harvey Wasserman**

Online Journal Guest Writers

COLUMBUS, August 31, 2005 ([freepress.org](http://freepress.org))—The shock waves from Ohio Governor Bob Taft's no contest plea to four misdemeanor ethics violations have turned this state's politics upside down. They also have direct roots in the stolen election of 2004.

Ohio's "Mr. Clean" governor has been forced to admit he took gratis golf games and other insider graft and goodies. His tearful no contest plea led to a nominal fine where lesser public figures could have gotten substantial jail time. Taft faced up to two years in jail.

The mainstream media has indeed reported that these gratuities have come from the usual thieves' den of contractors doing business with the state of Ohio. It's also well known that Tom Noe has been prominent among them. In fact, it has now been reported that Noe told Taft about controversial rare coin investments that may have cost the state millions as early as 2001, rather than 2004, as Taft has claimed. Also, the Columbus Dispatch reported that Taft failed to report eight additional gifts valued at more than \$75: three between 1999-2005; five between 2002-2004. Columbus City Prosecutor Steve McIntosh told the Dispatch that there wasn't likely to be a "second round of misdemeanors."

But the media has ignored the fact that Noe is also former chair of the Lucas County Board of Elections, a major Bush-Cheney donor, and a key player in the theft of Ohio's 2004 electoral votes. He is reportedly under federal investigation for laundering money into the Bush-Cheney re-election campaign. Election Day chaos and confusion in Noe's predominantly Democratic Lucas County helped give Bush a second term in the White House.

Time and again Taft has made public posturings about the need for all state employees to be completely free of even the perception of wrongdoing and corruption.

But the Taft sinkhole goes way beyond a few gubernatorial golf games. Millions of dollars are now missing from the Bureau of Workers' Compensation Fund, thanks to his friend Tom Noe's bizarre investment schemes. Noe ran a Toledo coin shop before being fingered as some kind of investment genius, designated to handle some \$50 million in state funds. When he got the account, Noe's first move was to write himself a check for fees well in excess of \$1 million. As of now, millions more are known to be missing in a "Coingate" scandal that has made headlines nationwide.

But Noe was also at the heart of Ohio's 2004 stolen election. As northwestern Ohio's "Mr. Republican," Noe was the gatekeeper for Toledo-area GOP politics for a dozen years. He chaired not only the Lucas County Republican Party, but also the Lucas County Board of Elections (BOE).

As BOE chair, Tom Noe made a high profile acquisition of Sequoia electronic voting machines, crowing about the speed with which they were installed. But by 2004, Lucas County was knee-deep in malfunctions involving the notorious Diebold opti-scan vote counters, which jammed before and during Election Day. In precinct after precinct throughout the heavily Democratic Toledo inner city, African-

American voters were disenfranchised en masse. Machines broke down, lines grew to three, four and five hours. Thousands left without voting.

At the Glenwood School, voting machines were locked in the principal's office. When he called in sick on Election Morning, hundreds of African-American citizens were denied the ability to vote. The situation was cemented by an edict from Republican Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell that paper ballots were not to be issued to Ohio precincts to cover when machines broke down.

At other Lucas County precincts, as citizens have testified under oath, unsuspecting voters were issued faulty markers which ruined the ballots on which they were used. Inner city voters thus left thinking they had voted when, in fact, their ballots were automatically trashed.

The overall situation in Lucas County became so infamously twisted with incompetence, malfeasance and corruption that in mid-2005, Blackwell was forced to issue a scathing staff report on voting practices there. In response, he threatened to fire the entire board of elections.

Board Chair Bernadette Noe had already announced her intention to resign. But independent researchers estimate that at least 7,000 votes were shifted in Lucas County from John Kerry to George W. Bush under her regime. Many thousands of African-American residents, most of them likely Kerry voters, were effectively disenfranchised.

The Toledo Blade reported that in the summer of 2004, 28,000 voters were "erased" from the Lucas County voter registration rolls. The purge included voters like Barbara and Ralph George "who first registered to vote for John F. Kennedy in 1960 and had lived in the same East Toledo house for 44 years." The Georges had called prior to their elimination from the voting rolls and had been told that they were eligible voters.

The Blade also reported that 40 of the provisional voters in precinct 4N were in the right room, but the wrong line on Election Day. All of their votes were rejected as were 50 of the 67 provisional ballots cast in the precinct. The volume of provisional ballots more than doubled when contrasted to the 2000 presidential election.

Taft is the first governor in Ohio history to be charged with misdemeanor ethics violations. His no contest plea opens a new chapter in Ohio politics. Whether its roots in the stolen election of 2004 will be fully exposed in the mainstream media remains to be seen. But we will continue to do our best.

*Harvey Wasserman & Bob Fittrakis are co-authors of the upcoming "How the GOP Stole the 2004 Election & Is Rigging 2008."*