

Legislator charged with voter fraud

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CASPER (AP) — Rep. Carolyn Paseneaux, R-Casper, was arrested Wednesday on two felony counts of voter fraud for allegedly listing an old address while voting in the August primary.

Paseneaux appeared before Natrona County Circuit Judge Michael Huber on a count of false swearing and a count of false voting. She was released on a personal recognizance bond, which would require her to pay \$2,500 if she violates the terms of her release.

Paseneaux, in a statement Thursday, blamed Democrats for the charges and asked voters to look beyond the emotional orgy that is distracting them from the important issues.

The truth of this matter will come out in court. I am looking forward to that time as I am completely innocent, she wrote.

Paseneaux can still run for re-election but she would have to leave office if she is convicted of a felony, Secretary of State Joe Meyer said.

Each charge is punishable by up to five years in prison and \$10,000 in fines.

According to a report from the Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, Paseneaux listed on an absentee ballot form the address of a home where she had not lived for more than a year.

She had moved different times since, selling a townhouse in 1997 because of financial difficulties.

The state started investigating Paseneaux after Democrats questioned whether she was following state residency requirements as a candidate for House District 38. Candidates are required to live in the district in which they are running for a year leading up to the Nov. 7

general election.

Paseneaux had briefly lived outside of her district but mostly stayed inside the boundaries. Outside the district, she spent time at 1244 S. Wolcott, where she has an office desk and phone. In addition, she lived with her dying sister in Harrison, Mont.

The probe initially found that Paseneaux had listed the old address while applying for the Republican Party nomination. Natrona County District Attorney Kevin Meenan concluded that she did not commit a crime because she did not list the address under oath. Also, he said he believed that Paseneaux was trying to establish a permanent resident in her district.

However, she was under oath when she filled out a request form for an absentee ballot for the primary, according to a supplemental report filed Tuesday by state investigator Al Bennett.

The form listed the old address, and the oath she took declaring the address to be accurate was recorded on the back of an envelope filed at the Natrona County clerk's office, the report said.

Paseneaux is running against Democrat John Jolley to represent Natrona and Fremont counties. Paseneaux, the House Agriculture, Public Lands and Water Resources Committee chairwoman, is seeking a fifth term.

Becky Costantino, chairwoman of the Wyoming Republican Party, said Paseneaux has campaigned hard in spite of the charges, accusations and pressures of the past month.

Paseneaux is still the most qualified and best candidate to represent the district. I sincerely hope she is re-elected next Tuesday, she said.

Jolley said he is sad that Paseneaux was arrested and she has a right to be tried by a jury of her peers.

If she is found guilty, I would hope that the prosecutor would give her as much leniency as he could, he said.

Meenan, who filed the charges, is also the vice chairman of the Natrona County Republican Party. He said his political activities are not a conflict of interest.

My obligation is to uphold the law and see that justice is done, he said.