

Douglas County couple caught voting in two states

By Mary Jo Pitzl, Arizona Republic

PHOENIX – “Vote early and vote often” is a laugh line politicians often invoke as they make a pitch for people’s support.

But it’s no laughing matter to a half-dozen former Arizonans, who have been prosecuted for voting twice in past elections.

Thanks to a data-sharing agreement among 20 states, Arizona can cross-reference its voter data with other states and ferret out people who vote more than once in the same election cycle.

In 2008, the Interstate Voter Registration Crosscheck Program snared four cases involving six people who voted for president in both Arizona and in another state. Earlier this year, Arizona Secretary of State Ken Bennett said the program had found 10 people who appeared to have voted twice in the 2010 election. Those cases are still under investigation, and the voters face possible prosecution. Work has not begun on cross-referencing voting information from the 2012 elections.

Records from the 2008 cases show the offending parties entered plea deals that left them with misdemeanor charges on their records.

Under the crosscheck program, started in Kansas, states agree to share voter information, including name, address, birth date, whether the individual voted in a given year and the voter’s identification number, Bennett said. The data is sent to a secure server located in Arkansas. The Kansas secretary of state then runs a program to cross-reference the information, identifies any duplicate voting, and, if

appropriate, shares that with the states where the multiple voting occurred.

So far, the program has resulted in few prosecutions compared with the millions of votes cast. Kansas reported three cases in 2008 referred to prosecution; four others were successfully prosecuted in Arizona.

In 2010, the program produced 11 instances of possible double voting involving Kansas and another state; in Arizona, the Secretary of State's Office said there are nine cases under way involving possible double voting in 2010.

Bennett himself has called such cases "rare" and said the penalties that state attorneys win can serve as a deterrent to anyone who thinks they might slip under the electoral radar.

Rodney Paul Jones was stunned when he was accused of a felony for attempting to vote illegally, said his attorney, Clark Derrick.

Jones was shuttling between the Phoenix-area and Colorado Springs, Colo., where he was doing work for the U.S. Air Force Academy. Court records show between December 2005 and August 2008, he registered to vote in Maricopa County, Ariz., and El Paso County, Colo., where the academy is located.

He got a mail-in ballot from Maricopa County and cast it in the November 2008 presidential election. He also cast a ballot in November 2008 in Colorado. Court records list Jones as a resident of Monument, Colo.

Jones initially pleaded not guilty, citing his heavy travel between Colorado and Arizona, and the confusion of the appearance of an early ballot at the Arizona home his wife maintained. But he changed his plea to guilty of a misdemeanor.

A Maricopa County Superior Court judge last year sentenced him

to 50 hours of community service, levied a \$4,600 fine and put him on one month unsupervised probation.

Derrick said the charge was out of character for Jones, whom he called a responsible person who worried the charge would imperil his employment. (It didn't.)

In another case, Peter Canova III voted by mail in Arizona's Republican presidential primary in January 2008, records filed in Maricopa County Superior Court show. He then voted in the fall general election, casting a ballot in Maricopa County and also in Douglas County, Nev.

Like her husband, Gina Thi Canova voted in Arizona's January 2008 presidential-preference election, as well as voting in November 2008 in Arizona and Nevada. She then continued to vote in other Arizona elections, including Arizona's August 2010 primary election. She also voted in Nevada's June 2010 primary election, records show.

The Canovas' original felony charges were reduced to misdemeanor charges of attempted illegal voting. Peter was sentenced to 200 hours of community service, fined \$9,200 (payable to Arizona) and put on two years of unsupervised probation. Gina has a stiffer penalty, given her more robust voting history: 300 hours of community service and a \$13,800 fine.

Records show the Canovas now live in Nevada. They could not be reached.