

Baldwin man convicted of fraud voted regularly under name of U.S. citizen, records show... Page 1 of 7



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Baldwin man convicted of fraud voted regularly under name of U.S. citizen, records show

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By Brendan Kirby, Press-Register

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Venustiano Hernandez-Hernandez ... voted in Alabama elections under assumed name.

MOBILE, Alabama — Federal authorities prosecuted Venustiano Hernandez-Hernandez for Social Security fraud and theft of government funds related to his life under an assumed name in Baldwin County, but they may have been able to add voter fraud, as well.

Records from the Baldwin County Board of Registrars show that Hernandez-Hernandez is registered to vote under the name of Severo Benavidez, the name he used for almost 4 decades after slipping into the United States from his native Mexico in the 1970s.

The Perdido Beach resident **pleaded guilty** earlier today to federal fraud charges as part of a deal in which aggravated identity theft will be dropped. He also faces possible deportation.

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Baldwin man convicted of fraud voted regularly under name of U.S. citizen, records show... Page 2 of 7

It is unclear whether federal prosecutors might pursue criminal charges against Hernandez-Hernandez related to voter fraud.

Ed Packard, an election official with the Alabama Secretary of State's Office, said Baldwin County's voter rolls have included Severo Benavidez since 1984. Packard said the 62-year-old man voted in the 1996 and 2008 general elections, the 2002 primary election and special elections on a constitutional amendment to overhaul Alabama's tax system in 2003 and to **incorporate Perdido Beach** as Baldwin County's 14th municipality in 2009.

Even if Hernandez-Hernandez were not eligible to vote because he is not a citizen, he likely would be removed from the voter rolls by virtue of his conviction. Packard said the U.S. Attorney's Office regularly sends election officials a list of people convicted of federal crimes. Those convicted of offenses involving "moral turpitude" are stricken from the rolls, he said.

According to court records, Hernandez-Hernandez, who had been using the name Zenaido Hernandez-Hernandez, obtained Benavidez's birth certificate after a previous deportation in 1974. He used that document to obtain a Social Security number and lived as Severo Benavidez from that point.

His life includes marrying, raising 2 children and working his way up the ranks at Vulcan Materials Co. He also obtained a loan from the Small Business Administration and ran a pair of companies, according to his attorney.

The Social Security Administration denied benefits to the real Severo Benavidez in 2010 after determining he already was receiving disability payments. The recipient turned out to be Hernandez-Hernandez.

According to court records, Benavidez — an American since birth — never has been to or traveled through Alabama.

Updated on March 7, 2012, to correct an error about terms of the defendant's plea agreement.

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