

Former recorder accused of conflict of interest over party

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When friends threw a retirement party two years ago for DuPage County Recorder J.P. "Rick" Carney, Fidar Election Co. picked up the \$9,000 dinner tab.

But Carney, who now is chairman of the DuPage Election Commission, insists that gift — and past campaign contributions — from the Rock Island-based election equipment vendor didn't buy his support for a controversial electronic voting machine.

Still, a watchdog group is calling Carney's participation in a December 2005 vote to spend more than \$4 million on 732 electronic voting machines produced by Diebold Election Systems "a shocking conflict of interest."

"Mr. Carney should have disclosed the contributions in a more public manner and recused himself from the vote," said Jean Kaczmarek, of the Illinois Ballot Integrity Project.

In fact, the Glen Ellyn resident said, Carney never should have accepted his appointment to the commission "knowing the public outcry against Diebold at the time."

Carney, who held the recorder's post for 20 years, responded to Kaczmarek's remarks Wednesday with his trademark candor.

"I actually think it's a pretty good criticism," he said. "It makes sense."

After all, Fidar sells Diebold's touch-screen voting machines, which have been criticized for having security flaws.

In 2003 and 2004, Fidar donated a total of \$3,500 to Carney's campaign. Then there's the \$9,000 the company kicked in for Carney's November 2004 retirement shindig in Wheaton, which cost about \$15,000.

"They (the Illinois Ballot Integrity Project) did some good research on that," Carney said.

But Carney said he has never received a campaign donation from Diebold.

And what disclosure reports don't show is Fidar's once-friendly relationship with Carney has hit the rocks.

Carney said it's because he got Fidar fired from the election commission when he was appointed to the board last November.

"They no longer have any contracts with the election commission at all," he said. "My becoming chairman of the election commission has cost Fidar millions."

For example, Fidar used to make more than \$500,000 per election because it printed the county's ballot cards. That printing contract has been given to another company.

And when the three-member election commission unanimously agreed to buy Diebold's voting machines, Carney said, the company was required to find a different local representative than Fidler.

"All I know is they (Fidler) no longer represent Diebold at the election commission," Carney said. "That's a fact."

Kaczmarek questioned whether the election commission can fire "the premier dealer" of Diebold's machines.

Either way, Kaczmarek said, it doesn't change her view that Carney shouldn't have participated in the vote.

"He obviously has a cozy relationship with Fidler going on if they are paying \$9,000 for his retirement party," she said.

Carney, who spent two decades overseeing DuPage's deeds and property titles, admits Fidler was one of his longtime vendors for the recorder's office. And the company donated to his campaign for years.

But that didn't stop him from severing Fidler's ties to the election commission.

"You've got to understand that old Fidler were friends of mine," he said. "The new Fidler are enemies of mine."

Fidler President Ernie Rigger didn't return several telephone messages Wednesday seeking comment.