

POLITICS

Las Vegas man at center of viral GOP voter fraud claim completes probation, avoids jail time



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Reno Gazette Journal

Published 11:42 a.m. PT Nov. 18, 2022

LAS VEGAS — A businessman whose fake claim of voter fraud in 2020 became viral after Nevada Republicans advertised the case as proof of widespread election fraud has successfully completed a one-year probationary period, allowing him to avoid a felony conviction on his record and jail time.

As part of a deal with state prosecutors, Donald "Kirk" Hartle, an executive at Ahern Rentals, a company with close ties to former President Donald Trump, was allowed to plead guilty on Thursday to conspiracy to vote more than once in an election — a gross misdemeanor. A judge ordered him to pay a \$2,000 fine.

Hartle was originally charged last October with two felony counts accusing him of using his dead wife's ballot in the 2020 presidential election. His spouse, Rosemarie Hartle, died in 2017.

State officials have said they began looking into Hartle after he appeared at a post-election news conference hosted by Adam Laxalt, who co-chaired Trump's Nevada reelection campaign, and American Conservative Union Chairman Matt Schlapp.

At the news conference, as Trump leveled baseless accusations that voter fraud in key swing states had cost him reelection that year, Hartle claimed that someone had stolen his wife's mail-in ballot — which state Republicans said was just one example of widespread election tampering in Nevada, a perennial presidential battleground.

President Joe Biden defeated Trump by more than 33,500 votes in Nevada.

Hartle, in an interview with KLAS-TV in Las Vegas at the time, said his case “lent some credence to what you’ve been hearing in the media about these possibilities.”

"And now," he'd said, "it makes me wonder how pervasive is this?"

Hartle faced up to eight years in prison had he been convicted of the original charges, but last November, he instead pleaded guilty to one felony count of voting more than once as part of the deal.

“This seems to me to be a cheap political stunt that kind of backfired,” Clark County District Court Judge Carli Kierny said at the time, “and shows that our voting system actually works because you were ultimately caught.”

Prosecutors agreed to postpone adjudication in the case for one year while Hartle completed his probationary period, which required him to "stay out of trouble." Upon completion this week, Hartle was allowed to plead guilty to the reduced charge.

His attorney, David Chesnoff, called the plea deal fair and said his client accepted responsibility for his actions.

Laxalt went on to run for U.S. Senate in Nevada this year with Trump's support, pushing election denialism to the forefront of his bid. He lost.

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