

voter-fraud plead guilty

By Mike Goens
SENIOR REPORTER

BIRMINGHAM — The final two members of the group known by some in their home county as the Winston 11 pleaded guilty to voter-fraud charges Monday in federal court.

Scotty D. Cole and Idas "Spooky" Neal Jr. said they conspired with nine others to buy absentee votes in the June 9 Republican primary election in Winston County.

The guilty pleas came only minutes before Cole and Neal were to stand trial at the Hugo Black Federal Courthouse.

Cole's attorney, Tommy Drake of Cullman, said the timing of his client's plea was "a matter of getting all the details worked out."

The group agreed to pay cash, money and beer for absentee ballots marked with the names of five predetermined candidates.

Cole, seeking the GOP nomination for county commission chairman, and Neal, a candidate for a district school board position, were among the candidates who reportedly benefited from the conspiracy. The others are District Judge Ann Richardson, Circuit Court Clerk William F. Bailey and school board candidate Denita Lee.

All five candidates were indicted in connection with the case.

Monday's court action brings a close to the case that has been a constant source of conversation in Winston County since June 8, when the first arrests were made.

In addition to the five candidates, Sheriff David Sutherland, Lakeshore Inn restaurant owner Mary Jo Ingram, Hakeyville resident Eugene Emerson and Jimmy Richardson, the judge's husband, filed guilty pleas.

Ann Richardson pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor state election charge of failing to properly report campaign expenditures.

The others pleaded guilty to felony federal and state charges but will have their sentences run concurrent.