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Vote fraud sentence includes meditation

Sunday, April 2, 2006
The Associated Press

ST. LOUIS -- A circuit judge in St. Louis has sentenced a woman who turned in voter registration cards in the name of dead local politicians to probation, community service and relaxation training using transcendental meditation.

Michelle Robinson, 36, pleaded guilty Friday on charges of 13 violations of election law and of possession of crack cocaine and a crack pipe.

Robinson worked for a campaign called Operation Big Vote that aimed to boost the participation of black voters in the 2001 St. Louis mayoral election. But some of the cards she turned in on Feb. 7, 2001, were made out in the names of several dead former city aldermen, triggering state and federal criminal investigations.

Robinson admitted in court Friday that she had filled out 13 fraudulent cards.

Judge David Mason of the 22nd Judicial Circuit Court of Missouri sentenced her to four years of probation on both the drug and election charges, but she could face three years in jail if she violates her probation.

She also must get training in transcendental meditation and perform 180 hours of community service.

Mason is an advocate of transcendental meditation, a practice led by a Hindu holy man named Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, which the judge believes is an effective relaxation and stress-management program.

Transcendental meditation is a 20-minute, twice-daily routine in which the meditator silently focuses on a mantra to induce relaxation and "dive into a state of pure consciousness."

Six other Big Vote workers who pleaded guilty in December 2004 to related violations, however, did not receive the same spiritual sentence. Five were sentenced to probation and 100 hours of community service.

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Last year, a St. Louis jury found the head of Big Vote guilty of lying to a grand jury during the investigation. The jury found that Nonaresa Montgomery lied when she told grand jurors that she had no way of tracking the cards that Big Vote turned in, many of which contained made-up names and nonexistent addresses or had been were filled out several times for the same person.

[EXECUTIVE](#)

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