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Stolen Election

By IRN/USA Radio News Editors

Special Note: Because of the fierce struggle to attain a “filibuster-proof” majority in the Senate, the Democrats have used every possible strategy to achieve that end. Al Franken’s questionable “victory” in the Senate race in Minnesota (if it is not overturned in the courts) could mean that Republicans will have no effective means to oppose Barack Obama’s radical agenda as it is pushed through Congress.

On January 5, the highly irregular recount process in the Senate race in Minnesota between Norm Coleman and Al Franken resulted in what appears to be a stolen election. Thanks to manipulations by Democratic Secretary of State Mark Ritchie and an apparently incompetent (if not actually corrupt) State Canvassing Board, Al Franken was certified as the winner of that race.

Franken started the recount 215 votes behind Senator Coleman, but curiously, ended up with a 225-vote lead. Franken, who earlier insisted on “counting every vote” suddenly opted at year end to shut the process down. There seems little doubt that Franken’s “victory” was abetted by Secretary of State Ritchie and his four Canvassing Board members, who have delivered inconsistent rulings and simply ignore glaring problems with the vote tallies.

Under Minnesota law, election officials are required to make a duplicate ballot if the original is damaged during election night counting. Officials are supposed to mark these as “duplicate” and segregate them from the original ballots. Apparently, some officials failed to mark ballots as duplicated, and they were counted, along with the originals. This helps explain why more than 25 precincts in the state came up with more ballots than voters who signed in to vote. Estimates are that this produced an additional 80-100 votes for Franken. One Canvassing Board member, State Supreme Court Justice G. Barry Anderson, acknowledged that there likely was double counting, but the board insisted it lacked the authority to question local officials. Instead, they simply added the inflated numbers to the vote totals.

Other irregularities and inconsistencies added votes to Franken’s total. Last month, Franken’s campaign claimed that one Hennepin County (Minneapolis) precinct had lost 133 votes, since the hand recount showed few ballots than machine votes recorded on election night. Although there is no proof of “missing” votes (officials may have accidentally run the ballots through the machine twice on election night), the Canvassing Board chose to go with the inflated election night total, rather than the actual number of ballots in the recount. That decision gave Franken a gain of 46 votes.

One Ramsey County precinct ended up with 177 more ballots than there were recorded votes on election night. In that case, the board decided to go with the extra ballots, rather than the election night total, even though the county is now showing more ballots than voters in the precinct. This gave Franken a net gain of 37 additional votes, which means he has benefited both ways from the board’s inconsistency. Apparently, the Franken campaign was allowed to have it both ways, while election official simply looked the other way.

As for absentee ballots, the Franken campaign initially protested that some absentee votes had been erroneously rejected by local officials. Counties were supposed to review their absentee ballots and create a list of those they believed were mistakenly rejected. Many Franken-leaning counties did so, and submitted 1,350 ballots to include in the result. But at this writing, many Coleman-leaning counties have yet to complete a re-examination. Despite this lack of uniformity, and although the state Supreme Court has yet to rule on a Coleman request to standardize this absentee review, Ritchie’s office “processed” the incomplete pile of 1,350 absentee ballots over the January 3 weekend, and padded Franken’s lead by 176 more votes.

Both campaigns have claimed Ritchie’s office made mistakes in tabulating votes that had been challenged. However, the Canvassing Board appears to have applied inconsistent standards in how it decided some of these challenged votes. Curiously, the standards that were applied gave an overall advantage to Franken, an outcome that is logically and statistically unlikely.

Given these multiple recount problems, it is highly improbable that the board could honestly certify a “fair election result. But some board members seem to have concluded that because one of the candidates will challenge the result anyway, why not get on with certification and leave the result to the courts? Mr. Coleman will certainly have grounds to contest the result in court; but given the fact that courts are usually reluctant to overrule a certified outcome, there is little certainty that he will win his case.

At this writing, Minnesota’s other Senator, Amy Klobuchar, is saying her fellow Democrats should seat Mr. Franken when the 111th Congress begins this week. However, this contradicts Minnesota law, which says the state cannot award a certificate of election if one party contests the results.

Election analysts say they can’t recall a similar recount involving optical scanning machines that changed so many votes, and in which nearly every crucial decision favored the same candidate. This tainted process, along with the murky political machinations in Illinois, gives us a foreboding of more corruption to come as this 2009 Congress gets underway.