



So Far, National Reporters Haven't Examined the Background Of Palm Beach Trio Suing For a Re-Vote

No Media Skepticism of Fla. Ballot Challengers

Are the plaintiffs demanding an unprecedented re-run of the presidential election in Florida's Palm Beach county really befuddled oldsters who were confused by a two-column ballot? Or are they really sophisticated local activists who assume that their protests against the election's integrity is Al Gore's last, best chance to be awarded the White House?

The national media have repeatedly relayed citizens' complaints about the supposedly baffling ballot, but the networks haven't looked at the backgrounds of the three plaintiffs who have put their names on the lawsuit hanging over the presidential election.

A Nexis search of Florida newspapers shows all three plaintiffs — Alberta McCarthy, Lillian Gaines and Andre Fladell — are savvy activists with political experience, not the sort of voters who'd be stymied by a ballot layout. Yet as the plaintiffs at the center of a historic suit, each plans to testify that they personally voted for Patrick Buchanan when they were aiming to vote for Al Gore:

■ **Lillian Gaines** says she's mortified that she might have voted for Buchanan. "I went to the polls for one specific reason, to vote for Gore. I hit the second hole. I am sure I did," she told the Associated Press. "Somehow my right to vote had been taken away from me."

But Gaines, now a homemaker, was for several years a member of the Children's Services Council, a big-budget, taxpayer-financed group in Palm Beach County. Gaines popped up in local newspapers in 1993 when she defended the group's expenditure of \$6,000 in taxpayer money on a beachside retreat. "From time to time, an organization needs to look at themselves," she told the *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel* as a reason why taxpayers should put her and her fellow council members up in a resort hotel.

■ **Alberta McCarthy** also claims she cast the wrong vote, but she's Delray Beach City Commissioner — hardly a political naif and presumably someone who can navigate a ballot.

■ **Andre Fladell**, with lawyer Howard Weiss, was a guest on CNN's Larry King Live Thursday night. "I had no idea that in this country you have to read zig-zag and diagonal to know who you're voting for," he complained. "I didn't go there to take a test. I went in to vote for President." He told CNSNews.com that when it came to voting, "I wasn't too bright."

But Fladell, dim as he may be, is more than just the chiropractor which many news accounts say he is. He's also a political consultant and Democratic activist, who celebrated his hardball approach in a 1999 interview. "Politics is the greatest challenge," Fladell proclaimed to local journalist Harris Meyer. "It's where the best and worst in people comes out.

You get the adrenaline of war without having to physically hurt anyone." (See box.)

In his piece, Meyer likened Fladell to Machiavelli, but the notorious pol says he was confounded by the ballot. As one of three plaintiffs, the truthfulness of his claim is crucial to any decision to trigger an unprecedented re-run of a presidential election. But, so far, reporters haven't seemed particularly skeptical of Gaines, McCarthy or Fladell, despite the obvious importance of their claims.

— Rich Noyes

Was Fladell Really Baffled by the Ballot?

"Next to volleyball Fladell's favorite sport is politics, and he plays it the same way he has since leading antiwar protests in the late '60s — with a ruthless drive to win. When he's not realigning patients' spines and stomping volleyball opponents, he's advising candidates and elected officials in Palm Beach County, mostly Democrats, on how to crush their election foes and steer government decisions their way." — from "Politics as Blood Sport," a profile of Palm Beach political consultant Andre Fladell, New Times Broward-Palm Beach, December 16, 1999.

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; **Brent Baker, Tim Graham**, Editors; **Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Ted King, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmouth**, Media Analysts; **Kristina Sewell**, Research Associate; **Liz Swasey**, Director of Communications. For the most complete media bias analysis, see the *CyberAlert* at www.mrc.org