

# Woodbury County counted, stored 2020 absentee ballots in building whose director was a Democrat running for office

During the 2020 election, a lot of oddities took place across the country. Iowa was not unique. An individual with information reached out to The Iowa Standard to let us know about an incident that they felt was strange in Woodbury County.

We confirmed with Woodbury County Auditor Pat Gill, a Democrat, that the circumstances were accurate.

Absentee ballots for the 2020 election were counted at the Sioux City Museum. They were also stored there over the couple of days they were being counted.

Gill said the decision was made to handle the ballots at the Sioux City Museum because of the COVID pandemic.

"The only reason that we moved them over there is the usual counting room is down in the basement here at the courthouse," he said. "That was a place that provided us space to spread out the precinct election officials that were counting the ballots."

Why did this seem strange to the individual who contacted The Iowa Standard?

Because the director of the Sioux City Museum was on the very ballots being counted at stored at the museum — Democrat State Rep. Steve Hansen.

Hansen won the race against Republican Bob Henderson by nearly 1,300 votes (55.9 percent to 44 percent).

By no means is the individual who contacted The Iowa Standard regarding this situation claiming anything illegal happened with ballots, and neither is The Iowa Standard. However, the optics are pretty bad.

Gill said an off-duty deputy sheriff was "constantly" with the ballots. And Hansen did not have access to where the ballots were being stored "during that period of time."

"Like I said, we had a deputy sheriff that was in there that was paid and plus it was a secured room that was locked and it was under surveillance 24 hours a day," Gill said.

The Iowa Standard reached out to Woodbury County Sheriff Chad Sheehan to verify a deputy sheriff was with the ballots 24-7. As of Wednesday night we hadn't heard from Sheehan.

We asked Gill if this is a practice they would do again in 2022.

"It is absolutely not something we would do this year," he said. "The whole time the ballots moved they were under the supervision of an off-duty deputy sheriff."

Gill was one of a few county auditors in Iowa sued by President Donald J. Trump's re-election campaign and GOP groups.

Woodbury County sent illegal ballot request forms to voters as it pre-populated voter names, date of birth and voting pin numbers on the forms.

The court granted the RNC's request for a temporary injunction against Gill and ordered his office to stop pre-populating ballot request forms prior to distribution. It also ruled pre-populated forms received back were invalid.

Regardless how ballots were transferred, stored and counted, the optics of counting and storing them at a building under the direction of a person literally on those ballots should have cautioned against such a decision.

Either Gill or Hansen should have realized handling the absentee ballots in such a way could lead to some skepticism about the integrity of the election — especially after Gill lost the lawsuit regarding pre-populating absentee request forms.

Author: [The Iowa Standard](#)