



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on June 7, 2014

McDaniel Workers Cleared in Miss. Courthouse Caper

An aide to U.S. Senate candidate Chris McDaniel and two campaign supporters were locked in a Mississippi courthouse with the ballots from the primary voting early Wednesday morning, but an investigation by the Hinds County Sheriff's Department has cleared the trio of any criminal wrongdoing.

"Voters in Hinds County can rest assured that there wasn't a breach of security as it relates to the integrity of the voting process," department spokesman Othor Cain said in a written statement. "All voting ballots were placed in a secured vault inside of the Hinds County Circuit Clerk's Office, which was also locked during the time these individuals were in the building."



McDaniel barely edged ahead of six-term incumbent Republican Thad Cochran late Tuesday night, but both candidates fell just short of the 50 percent marked needed to avoid a June 24 runoff for the Republican nomination. Thomas Carey, by capturing just 1.8 percent of the vote, prevented either man from gaining a majority of the votes.

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According to the D.C. publication *The Hill*, Scott Brewster, McDaniel's campaign coalition director, Janis Lane with the Central Mississippi Tea Party, and Rob Chambers, a consultant with the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, came late to the courthouse to check on the vote totals. Everyone else was gone when they arrived and they found themselves locked in when a door closed behind them.

"Our investigation revealed that the three individuals were able to enter the courthouse through a side-door marked for employees only," Cain said in his release. "This door was either propped-open or was malfunctioning at the time of entry." Lane initially said uniformed personnel had let the three into the building, something Cain's report refuted.

"Contrary to earlier reports, no uniformed personnel and more specifically, no employee of the Hinds County Sheriff's Office assisted these individuals with gaining access to the courthouse," it said. "These individuals only had access to the common areas of the courthouse, which includes the hallways, and restroom area."

The odd situation had, nonetheless, fueled speculation and controversy in a race already colorful and contentious, with McDaniel, 41, suggesting none too subtly that the 76-year-old incumbent is well past retirement age after 36 years in the U.S. Senate, preceded by six years in the House. The Cochran campaign has portrayed McDaniel, a lawyer and radio commentator, as an out-of-touch Tea Party candidate and an opportunist with his finger to the wind.

McDaniel has benefited from strong grassroots support, while Cochran is backed by a virtual "Who's Who" in Mississippi business and politics, including former Governor Hailey Barbour. He has stressed



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his seniority in Congress and his record of support for people and projects in the state. While the Cochran supporters consider it an admirable ability to “bring home the bacon” from Washington, Cochran’s bacon is pork to McDaniel, who has accused the senator of excess spending and willingness to go along with Obama.

The winner of the June 24 balloting will face former Rep. Travis Childers, who Tuesday night won the state Democratic nomination, and Reform Party candidate Shawn O’Hara in the November election. With less than three weeks to go before the runoff, Cochran is expected to run negative ads of his own and do less touting of his Washington experience and connections.

The race has already had some low moments, particularly when, *Politico* noted, several pro-McDaniel activists were arrested and charged with a lurid conspiracy to break into a nursing home and take photographs of the senator’s wife, Rose Cochran, who suffers from progressive dementia. Cochran campaign spokesman Jordan Russell told *National Review* Thursday that the McDaniel campaign is “full of criminals.”

“They cannot keep themselves out of trouble with the law,” Russell said. “This is a campaign that is out of control.”

Photo of Chris McDaniel: AP Images



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