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Secretary of State Honors Benedictine Sisters of Erie for Courage in Refuting Disinformation and Commitment to Civic Engagement

Erie, AP – Secretary of State Al Schmidt today visited the [Benedictine Sisters of Erie](#) Monastery to celebrate their [Margaret Chase Smith American Democracy Award](#) from the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) and to induct two members of their community into the [Pennsylvania Voter Hall of Fame](#).

“I nominated the Sisters for this national award for their courage in refuting false voter fraud claims against them and using their time in the spotlight to encourage people to be conscientious consumers of social media,” **Schmidt** said. “They’re true role models of civic engagement. They vote faithfully, carpooling to the polls on Election Day or casting their ballots by mail. One member of their community has also served as a poll worker, enabling members of the larger Erie community to make their voices heard.”

Two weeks before the 2024 presidential election, a post on X went viral claiming that a political operative had gone to the Sisters’ monastery, where 53 voters were registered, and found that “NO ONE lives there.”

The post – which included a video showing the names, ages, and alleged political affiliations of the nuns – was viewed more than 2.5 million times and drew 33,000 likes and more than 13,000 comments.

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie, who have lived in and served the community for 170 years, were quickly overwhelmed with support from the public. In response, the nuns issued a [press release](#) and engaged in interviews with print, television, radio, and online media to correct the disinformation.

Sister Stephanie Schmidt (no relation to **Secretary Schmidt**), the community’s prioress at the time, said in an interview with [CNN](#) that she urged the sisters at the monastery to vote, but the Benedictine Sisters are nonpartisan and don’t endorse any party or candidate.

During his visit, **Secretary Schmidt** presented **Sister Marcia Sigler** and **Sister Rosanne Loneck**, both 82, with [Pennsylvania Voter Hall of Fame](#) certificates for voting in at least 50 consecutive November elections.

Secretary Schmidt also noted that another member of the community – **Sister Ann Hoffman** – has served as a poll worker in the past.

To receive the [Margaret Chase Smith American Democracy Award](#) – which recognizes acts of political courage, uncommon character, and selfless action in the realm of public service – more than 50% of the current Secretaries of State who are members of NASS must vote for the same nominee. Previous winners include former President Jimmy Carter, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, civil rights and voting rights activists such as Rosa Parks, and Laura Wooten, the longest-serving poll worker in American history.

When the award was presented to the Sisters at NASS' 2026 Winter Conference in Washington, D.C., **Secretary Schmidt** was unable to attend. He promised the Sisters he would visit the monastery to personally congratulate them.

A livestream of the event is available at <https://pacast.com/live/dos>.

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