

First LWV Election Observer Corp Activity

Bellingham/Whatcom County Leaguers, Lynne Rein, Mary Morgan McCartor, Mary LeDonne, Robbi Ferron, and Lynn Bellinger comprise the first LWV Election Observer Corp. The 'Corp' will observe the election process for the November 3, 2009 General Election. Statute permits the major political party representatives to observe 'up close and personal'. This is the first time non-partisan citizens are observing.

Auditor Office staff Pete Griffin and Lori Starkovich trained political party and citizen election observers and Opening Board temporary employees on October 19, 2009. Election Observers protect the integrity of the election by observing election activities.

Griffin trained on the four following areas 1) Logic and Accuracy test for the tabulation system, 2) Processing Ballots; 3) Counting Center activities and 4) Election Certification.

Ballot processing includes collecting ballots, opening the outer envelop, counting and recording, making 'batches' of 120 ballots as they arrive, verifying voter signatures and keeping the ballots private and secure. At a separate location, the privacy envelop is opened and the number of ballots separated, counted and stored until they are counted on election day.

Griffin explained how when counting votes on the ballots the counting machines separate out ballots with anomalies such as stray marks. All write-in votes, real or fictitious, are separated. He indicated how those ballots are documented and traced to the end of the process.

Starkovich's directed her presentation primarily to the Opening Board. She used the State of Washington official guide to interpreting voter intent in a variety of potential situations. For example, why a ballot must be 'duplicated' manually. The tabulating machine will not count a race where there is ambiguity because of cross out marks. It is programmed not to accept any ambiguity. Staff manually duplicate the ballot and include the vote that needed interpretation of voter intent - using the guidelines. They then run the duplicated ballot, which the machine will now tabulate or count. The Opening Board and Observers were given the State Guide.

Griffin emphasized how every ballot is accounted for by it being documented at each step in the process.

Counting the votes on ballots mailed in prior to election day begins in the Counting Center on election day. During the day observers select 6 batches from which one race per batch will be hand counted. On Wednesday following election day the political party representatives tell the Auditors office which race for each of the six batches they want hand counted. It is interesting that the hand count during the primary election counting the hand count was one vote more than the machine count.

Contemporary election counts may be released beginning at 8 PM on election night.

Observation continues beyond the day following the election. Ballots will trickle in and if they meet criteria must be counted up until Certification.. Military ballots for troops overseas are sent 30 days before election day, nonetheless they may trickle in.

Certification occurs on the 21st day following the election and should be on November 24. Observers may observe.

Griffin and Starkovich provided handouts of their visual presentation, effectively and professionally answered all questions and explained the reason for each procedure.

Robbi Ferron coordinates LWV observations with the political party representatives, Jim Fox and Larry Helm.