



## Metropolitan King County Council

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December 15, 2004

### Councilmembers Call for Emergency Meeting

Following the discovery of errors in tabulating ballots, several members of the Metropolitan King County Council called today for an emergency meeting of the Council for a briefing on the escalating problems with election procedures.

In a [letter](#) to Council Chair Larry Phillips, Republican Councilmembers [David Irons](#), [Steve Hammond](#), [Kathy Lambert](#), [Jane Hague](#) and [Pete von Reichbauer](#) urged Phillips to convene a Council meeting before King County's hand recount of ballots in the governor's race is completed next week, and before the Canvassing Board takes any action in regard to newly discovered ballots. The Council's last regularly scheduled meeting of the year was on Monday, Dec. 13, and the Council is not scheduled to meet again until Jan. 10, 2005, following the winter recess.

"It is inexcusable that hundreds of voters have been disenfranchised because of procedural errors that threaten to compromise the integrity of our elections," said Councilmember Irons of Sammamish. "Especially in the closest race for governor ever in this country, we have no margin for error or miscalculation."

On Monday, the Elections Office announced that 561 absentee ballots were thrown out without being tabulated and further evaluated for legitimacy because the signatures on them could not be located in the Elections computer system. In such cases, Elections Office procedures call for rejected ballots to be compared with original signatures in permanent paper files. According to Elections Director Dean Logan, that did not occur with rejected ballots from the Nov. 2 election. The number of disqualified ballots was revised to 573 yesterday, and an additional 22 ballots were found inside voting machines.

Councilmember Hammond of Enumclaw called for more consistency in procedural decisions in the Elections Office. He pointed to his own campaign last year, in which one of his opponents in the primary did not legally qualify for the ballot.

"The Elections office erroneously counted signatures on the candidacy petition that weren't even from the 9th Council District, but then claimed the mistake couldn't be corrected after the fact," Hammond said. "Now, they are insisting on correcting a mistake after the fact. The lack of consistency on this principle betrays a bias that does not belong in the Elections Division."

Councilmember Lambert of Redmond added that her constituents are tired of the perceived manipulation of the election every time more ballots are uncovered or errors are discovered.

"Elections need to be above every suspicion, and we need to enable Dean Logan to make all needed procedural changes immediately," Lambert said.

"The credibility of our election process is in serious danger," Irons said. "Any tabulation errors must be corrected before an election is certified. The certification process ensures that elections remain in the control of voters,

not the courts or the parties. The public must have confidence in our balloting system, and we are committed to doing everything possible to restore that confidence."

The Councilmembers also joined in calling on Secretary of State Sam Reed to order an independent outside audit of King County's Elections Division. The office had experienced on-going problems with mailing of absentee ballots that resulted in the recent replacement of the division director and the elections superintendent.

"Because of previous problems with absentee ballots, and because of the large number of absentee voters in King County, we have established specific procedures to ensure accurate tabulation of ballots," Hammond said. "But those procedures are useless if we don't follow them. We need an independent review to determine the nature of the disconnect in this system, and to recommend improvements."

"When he arrived, Dean Logan faced a big challenge to overhaul elections procedures and ensure they are implemented," Lambert said. "Apparently, the scope of the problem goes beyond what we imagined, and it will take additional work to resolve. An outside authority can give us the perspective to clarify the problems, which will speed up implementation of effective corrections."

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This page was last updated on September 11, 2006

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