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## Morale "very low" among election workers

**By Keith Ervin**  
*Seattle Times staff reporter*

Morale among King County election workers is at an all-time low because of poor management and public anger over the bungled 2004 election, workers say in a new look at their work world.

"This whole election snafu is a total embarrassment. Whenever anyone asks where I work, I'm humiliated before I even say anything," one worker wrote in an anonymous online survey released yesterday.

Another called Elections Director Dean Logan and his newly demoted assistant, Superintendent Bill Huennekens, "small-town boys with no experience in running a large election operation. We well deserve the appellation [sic] of the 'worst election department in the United States.' "

Other respondents said they were proud of their work and expressed fierce loyalty to Logan in their no-holds-barred responses to the survey conducted by the King County Independent Task Force on Elections.

The panel, appointed by County Executive Ron Sims, is scheduled to make its recommendations for improving elections July 31. The task force was set up after a series of election mishaps, including the discovery this spring that 96 valid absentee ballots were not counted.

The task force released survey results yesterday in response to a public-records request by The Seattle Times. Thirty-four of 47 full-time and long-term temporary workers responded.

Among the findings:

- Seventy-three percent said internal communication is poor.
- Fifty-nine percent said written procedures and manuals are poor or nonexistent.
- Seventy-six percent reported low or very low confidence in Huennekens. Fifty-six percent had high or very high confidence in Logan.
- More workers felt things have gotten worse since 2002 than felt things have improved.
- Fifty-four percent rated their own morale as poor, and 48 percent said they are embarrassed to work in elections.

"What was compelling to me was the depth of the staff's concerns," said task force chairwoman Cheryl

Scott. "These people want to do a good job. They're not people who don't care.

"Morale is very low. [The staff] has the idea they're not listened to."

At a meeting of the task force yesterday, members found "a climate of fear that dissuades employees from informing their supervisors of problems or offering solutions to them." And it said the Elections Section failed to strike a balance between "protecting the jobs of failing employees and protecting the reputations" of competent workers.

The panel also said Huennekens' upcoming \$3,900 pay cut to \$80,357 a year will reinforce workers' perception that managers and employees are treated differently.

Logan issued a lengthy written response to the employee survey, saying there is "no excuse for this year's past performance. ... "

"My staff is as embarrassed as I am about the problems and mistakes made last year," Logan wrote. "They are also committed to transparency and excellence despite hundreds of headlines that suggest otherwise. The reality is these employees endure a pressure-cooker environment as many as eight months of the year."

Logan outlined a number of steps he has taken, including demoting Huennekens and sharpening employee training, that he said would improve elections.

His boss, County Executive Sims, said the "culture and climate" of the elections office is "simply unacceptable. I'm not surprised by this survey; it simply quantifies what we already knew. Make no mistake, changes are in the works."

County Councilman David Irons, R-Sammamish, who is running against Sims and who has proposed putting elections in the hands of an elected auditor, said the survey shows Logan isn't up to the job.

"Dean Logan is a good person, he just doesn't have the depth of management experience." Irons said. "It's like taking the captain of a destroyer and saying, 'Now you're the captain of an aircraft carrier.' "

Employees' comments showed years of pent-up frustration over poor leadership and communication. "I am one of the assistant superintendents and I got all of my information from the media first," one manager wrote.

A lower-level worker claimed to have been suspended before the November election "because I would not shut up about our lack of preparation."

One employee professed "a tremendous respect for Dean Logan. ... In my opinion he is by far the most qualified director that we have had."

Another disagreed: "Mr. Logan says that he has an open door policy, it is just hard to find the door open."

Among other employee comments:

"It seems like the last couple of management teams who have come in here ... have focused on superficial issues to try to make us 'look' better on the surface, such as the implementation of a dress code, purchasing new desks for the office, hiring a communications specialist."

The only employee who signed her name to her comments was Nicole Way, who is on paid leave pending completion of an investigation into problems in the absentee-ballot operation, which she supervises.

"I [raised] concerns for many months about issues we were having and those concerns fell on deaf ears," Way wrote. "And now I am the one being held responsible for it. The problems in the KC Elections office will not go away until EVERYONE is held accountable for their actions."

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