



PLACER COUNTY GRAND JURY

Election Report

Report Date: April 12, 2011

Election Report

Summary

Members of the Grand Jury attended election proceedings on November 2, 2010 and on January 4, 2011. The Grand Jury has found that the Placer County Registrar of Voters, Jim McCauley, and the employees in the Elections Office are doing an outstanding job. The Elections Office is always seeking ways to cut election costs, increasing voter registration, and providing voter and candidate education.

Background

Grand Jurors were invited by Placer County’s Clerk-Recorder-Registrar of Voters, Jim McCauley, to monitor the proceedings for processing ballots at the Clerk-Recorder-Registrar office in Auburn.

Jim McCauley has been serving Placer County since 1987. He is a graduate of California schools including the UC Davis Campaign Management Institute where he also served as an advisor and instructor for 10 years. Jim was hired as Placer County Manager of Candidate Services in 1987 and was appointed Placer County Clerk-Recorder-Registrar of Voters-Commissioner of Marriages in 1993. He was elected in 1994 and every four years thereafter.

Investigation Methods

The Grand Jury observed the procedures used for processing absentee ballots for the statewide election held on November 2, 2010 and also the Special Vacancy General Election for the State Senate race for District 1 held on January 4, 2011. The jurors also attended a verification of ballot signature procedures on November 5, 2010.

Facts

Process

- As of October 18, 2010 there were 202,876 registered voters in Placer County. Of that number, 56% have registered to permanently vote by mail.
- At polling places, the ballots are run through an AccuVote®-OSX optical scanning unit, which tabulates the results on a “smart card” at the polls. After the poll closes, these “smart cards”, along with precinct materials, are transported to receiving centers located throughout the County. Once all precincts have reported to the receiving center, Sheriff’s deputies escort the receiving center

personnel and “smart cards” to the Election Office. Election Office personnel take the “smart cards” and load them into their central counting computer.

- Per state law, each county must have an AccuVote®-TSX System (touch screen) available at each polling place for handicapped voters. Because of this law it has cost Placer County 2.1 million dollars for these machines. In the June 2010 Primary Election, only three voters used these TSX machines. In the January 4, 2011 Special Vacancy Election, only two voters used these machines. In the November 2010 General Election, 25 votes were recorded at one precinct. A poll worker encouraged use of the TSX machines by voters. The poll worker was then advised by election officials that the TSX machines were to be used by disabled voters unless a voter specifically requests to use the TSX machine.
- To help ensure that all ballots are counted, Placer County Elections Office personnel are dispatched to each post office in the County and the large post office processing centers of West Sacramento and Reno, Nevada. Ballots are collected which might otherwise have remained at those offices and centers and would not be counted because they must be received and postmarked prior to 8 P.M. on election day.
- If an absentee ballot is returned to the post office as being undeliverable, the Elections Office has an agreement with the post offices in Placer County whereby they will be returned to the Elections Office so the voter database may be updated.
- By State law, returned absentee ballots can start to be counted by the Elections Office starting 10 days prior to the election but the results cannot be released before the precincts close on Election Day. These absentee counts are usually released at 8:05 P.M. on Election Day.
- There is a bar-code on the envelopes of absentee and provisional ballots. At the Elections Office these returned envelopes are passed through a reader, which brings up the signature of the voter on their original voter registration and is compared against the signature on the envelope. Go to website: http://www.placerelections.com/uploads/documents/voter_guide1.pdf for more information about “What is a Provisional Ballot?”
- Ballots are separated from the envelopes to ensure each vote remains anonymous when counted.
- By State law, one percent (1%) of all ballots must be hand counted to check for accuracy.

- The election cannot be certified until all votes have been verified. The Registrar of Voters has 28 days after an election to verify the counts.
- The public and candidates are invited to observe the election process on the evening of the election. They are also welcome to observe how the staff processes the vote-by-mail ballots and other election activities before, during, and after the election. One of Mr. McCauley's goals is to make the voting process as transparent as possible. On the election evening, Mr. McCauley gives a 30-minute presentation to the assembled public on the voting process and encourages questions.

Staffing

- For the fiscal year 2010-2011, there are 18 direct elections staff positions allocated for the Elections Office of which 17 are funded, i.e. one position is unfunded due to overall fiscal constraints. Fifteen of the 17 positions are filled with permanent staff. Just before and after a scheduled election, supplemental staff from the Clerk-Recorder's Office provides extra help at peak periods. Hundreds of poll workers and related election officials are hired to conduct an election.

Costs

- Mr. McCauley and his office strive to encourage citizens to vote and to make it easier for them to cast their ballot while keeping costs down.
- Since 1995 all elections for Districts are held in the even numbered years to reduce costs. It is estimated that the County saved \$384,650 in fiscal year 1994-1995 with this consolidated election, which was approved by the Board of Supervisors.
- It is estimated that the County has saved an average of \$497,995 per even-year November General Elections since 1995.
- The estimated direct costs for conducting the November 1993 Election were \$362,400, or **\$3.32** per registered voter (for 109,288 registered voters). Revenue from districts and cities for costs of their November 1993 governing board/council elections was \$100,714 for that year.
- In fiscal year 2008-2009, total direct November 2008 election costs (November 2010 election costs are still being validated) were \$1,446,611 or **\$7.27** per registered voter for (199,087 registered voters) including costs for absentee ballots and costs for the consolidated district/council races. The County received \$1,162,262 in election services revenue from districts and cities for their November 2008 governing board/council elections.

- Factors accounting for the overall increase in direct election or ballot processing costs per registered voter from November 1993 to November 2008 include:
 - The general Consumer Price Index (CPI) for California increased 51% from 1993 to 2008;
 - Average County employee costs for salaries and benefits increased substantially during this period, especially for employee pension and health insurance costs, including retiree health insurance costs;
 - Direct Elections staffing increased from eight allocated positions in 1993 to 18 by 2008;
 - New Help America Vote Act (HAVA) voting requirements for voting systems and poll workers were implemented after the 2000 Presidential Election;
 - New and increased ongoing costs were absorbed for optical scan and “touch screen” computerized voting equipment and maintenance, and for elections management systems software and systems maintenance;
 - Poll worker stipends and training requirements were increased by the County in 2006 to assist with recruitment and retention of poll workers and to compensate poll workers for additional voting equipment and HAVA procedure training;
 - Security requirements for electronic voting were increased significantly by the California Secretary of State beginning in 2007.

Programs

- The Elections office offers programs to reach the citizens of Placer County to make it easier to vote and to become involved with the process. A few of these programs are:
 - **High School Voter Outreach**
Election office personnel go to high schools and students are given information regarding the different political parties and races, how to vote, and encouraged to register to vote if they will be 18 years of age by the next election. Voter registration between the ages of 18-24 year olds has increased from 22% to 85% since the inception of this program.

- **Senior Citizen Voter Outreach**
Election office staff works with senior citizen residential and assisted-care facilities to offer new residents the assistance in updating their voter registration and offer them permanent vote-by-mail status.
- **Student Poll Worker Program**
High school students aged 16 years or older and who are U.S. citizens with at least a 2.5 grade point average can work as clerks in polling places. They are paid a poll worker stipend and gain experience in the election process.
- **Candidate Workshops**
Usually six months prior to a major election, the Elections Office holds a series of informational workshops for potential candidates. Questions are answered pertaining to the processes necessary to run for an office. Speakers can include current officeholders, campaign consultants, media, etc. that can relate their experience and answer questions.

Findings

The Grand Jury finds:

- F1. The Registrar of Voters' total direct cost to execute an election per registered voter has increased from \$3.32 to \$7.27 (not adjusted for inflation) over the past 18 years. The Registrar of Voters has taken innovative steps in an effort to mitigate the costs, saving an average of \$497,995 per even-year November General Election for each of the past 15 years.
- F2. Significant processes and partnerships are in place for vote casting, transport, and voter verification to minimize disenfranchised voters.
- F3. The Registrar of Voters office actively seeks to increase voter registration and voter and candidate education through several robust programs.

Conclusion

The Grand Jury has found that the Placer County Registrar of Voters, Jim McCauley, and the employees in the Elections Office are doing an outstanding job. The Elections Office continually seeks ways to cut election costs, increase voter registration, and provide voter and candidate education.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury has no recommendations.

Request For Responses

Jim McCauley/County Clerk-Recorder-
Registrar of Voters
Placer County Clerk-Recorder-Elections
2954 Richardson Drive
Auburn, CA 95603

Due by June 12, 2011

Thomas Miller, County Executive Officer
County of Placer
175 Fulweiler Avenue
Auburn, CA 95603

Due by July 12, 2011

Copy Sent To

Placer County Board of Supervisors
175 Fulweiler Avenue
Auburn, CA 95603