

## **So You Don't Think Your Vote Counts – Two Examples from the November Election**

The election on November 1, 2011, ended in a tie on two of the choices on the ballot: the third member or the Bayfield School Board, and the Ignacio School Bond Issue. Two of the election judges for the fall election were LWV LPC members, Ann Flatten and I, Marilyn Sandstrom. These ties mandated recounts of the ballots. (If the difference is less than ½ %, state statute demands a recount, paid for by the county.)

Election judges (those having done the original processing) were asked to assist with the recount. Seven of us participated. The group totaled 10, these seven plus 3 election canvassers\*: administrative assistants to the Bayfield and Ignacio School superintendents, and a representative of Durango Fire and Rescue Authority.

The week of November 7, these workers met at the Clerk's office and sorted ballots. This year there were 15 ballot types. The ballots which included the two tied issues were gleaned from the ballots and handled separately. This work was done in pairs, with either members of different political affiliations or with one of the canvassers included in the pair. The ballots were then batched into bundles of 50 and choices on the tied votes of one batch were hand counted by the pairs. The ballots were then counted by the Accuvote machine (the electronic vote counter) to assure the results were the same. Discrepancies were found, always the error of the hand count! This process certified the accuracy of the automatic counting.

The ballots were once again locked up with the official recount scheduled for Monday, November 14<sup>th</sup>.

On November 14<sup>th</sup>, the 7 election judges and 3 canvassers arrived at 9. We could not enter the room with the ballots and Accuvote machines until we had all arrived, signed in, and once again signed the election judge oath. We were not allowed to leave the room once the recount began.

The Clerk had invited the Secretary of State (SOS) to participate and an attorney from the Office of the SOS was present.

I worked with the canvasser from the Bayfield School District. We did everything together. We once again scanned and hand counted one batch of ballots, two other judges fed them through the Accuvote to insure the results were identical. We were then ready to proceed. My partner and I recounted each batch, visually scanned each ballot to insure no extraneous or questionable marks were on the ballot. When finished with a batch it was then ready to be processed automatically by a different pair of workers. All of the batches were treated in this manner by the two of us and another pair of judges since the quantity of ballots for Bayfield far exceeded the number for Ignacio.

There was one ballot which had been flagged the prior week. There had been marks on the ballot for 3 of the 4 candidates. Two of the marks had been erased, leaving a barely visible mark

for one of the candidates. This was a candidate who was tied. The ballot was duplicated, omitting the choices which had clearly been erased. This resulted in one of the tied candidates having one less vote, breaking the tie.

The Ignacio Bond Issue count ended the same as the original count.

Our job was done. The Bayfield tie had been resolved, the Ignacio tie prevailed.

When originally processing the ballots, as the envelopes are opened the stub number on the ballot is matched to the ballot number on the envelope, to insure the voter voted the correct ballot. (When the numbers match, the stub is removed, thereby insuring the ballot is anonymous.) If the numbers do not match, (household members frequently switch envelopes) the ballot is set aside. A match is usually found with the other household member; the ballots and envelopes are then swapped and both ballots counted. The procedure has been that when no match is found at the conclusion of processing all ballots, the unmatched ballot is not counted. Half of the counties have followed this protocol. The attorney from the Office of the SOS said this was not legally required and these ballots could be counted. In reviewing the ballots set aside and including them in the count, it made a difference, again, of one vote, in the outcome of the Ignacio Bond issue. The Clerk called the canvassers to come back to the office and they agreed to accept that ballot; the bond issue passed. The Clerk indicated that from now on the policy will be to count unmatched ballots.

Had the two tied results prevailed, the Bayfield School Board Member would have been selected by a “flip of the coin” and the Ignacio School Bond Issue would have failed.

This was an extremely precise, fair, and thorough undertaking. I was very impressed with the care taken to insure the results the voters wanted.

So you see, **EVERY VOTE COUNTS!!!!!! Tell your friends!**

Marilyn J. Sandstrom, LWV Voter Service Committee

12/19/11

*\* Ed. Note: The definition and role of ‘canvassers’ was addressed by Tiffany Parker at the holiday potluck. See the write-up of her talk.*