

YOLO COUNTY ELECTIONS OFFICE

SUMMARY

The Yolo County Elections Office performed commendably by consistent adherence to protocol and procedures designed to ensure that each vote was counted properly. However, crowded conditions at voting sites with multiple precincts at times led to voter confusion.

REASON FOR VISIT

The California Penal Code (Title 4, Chapter 3, Article 2, Section 925) states that “The Grand Jury shall investigate and report on the operations, accounts, and records of the officers, departments, or functions of the county including those operations, accounts, and records of any special legislative district or other district in the county created pursuant to state law for which the officers of the county are serving in their ex officio capacity as officers of the districts.”

The Grand Jury was invited by the County Clerk-Recorder to observe processing of mail-in ballots at the Elections Office located in Woodland prior to Election Day. The Grand Jury was invited to observe voting sites throughout the County on Election Day (November 2, 2010).

ACTIONS TAKEN

The Grand Jury visited the Elections Office on October 29, 2010. Jurors were provided a facilities tour, observed pre-election processing of mail-in ballots, and spoke with management and staff.

On November 2, 2010, the Grand Jury met with the County Clerk-Recorder, who provided training and materials to assist the Grand Jury in observing polling sites throughout the County.

Observational visitations occurred in both the cities of Woodland, West Sacramento, Winters, and Davis and the unincorporated towns of Esparto, Guinda, Knights Landing, Yolo, Dunnigan, Clarksburg and Zamora. Observations were performed at sites of single polling precincts, combined polling precincts at a single site (one table), and combined polling precincts at sites with multiple tables (2 groups). A rural visitation was made at the Willow Oak Fire Hall.

WHAT THE JURY DETERMINED

Election Office Observations

The Administrative Election Calendar for the Statewide General Election of November 2, 2010, began on April 21, 2010, and concluded on January 11, 2011. This Calendar consisted of 310 step requirements to administer this election.

Staff at the Elections Office were welcoming and informative regarding the operations of the Elections Office and voting system prior to, during, and post-election day. Office function appeared organized and operated smoothly even during peak periods. Management oversaw and when necessary troubleshoot processing of absentee ballots for counting. Certain steps in processing were performed only by career staff. In other operations, under guidance, temporary staff performed other steps including opening, sorting, and preparing absentee ballots that were either mailed in or dropped off by the voters.

Once sorted, ballots were fed by permanent staff at a rapid pace through large scanners where ballot data was stored on computers until polls closed on election night. All ballots and election equipment were stored in a locked and secure cage prior to the end of shift. Shortly after polls closed, the tabulation process was activated in the computers and absentee ballots were counted within approximately 10 minutes. Results were posted immediately on the departmental website. The media uses this information along with exit polls to prepare early results predictions.

A variety of checks and balances are built into the tabulation system to ensure counting accuracy. This includes checking signatures on the mail-in ballots against copies of the original voter registration forms that have been scanned into the computer system. In addition, all hard-copy voter registration forms are stored in the Elections Office. Random ballots are hand-counted by teams of four who monitor each other's role in the hand counting.

Observations in the Field Precincts on Election Day

The Grand Jury observed that whether in a city school room, town hall, or rural fire station, each site visited contained the same set-up of equipment, outside and indoor notifications, maps, precinct information and general setup of tables.

Citizens who operated the polling sites were congenial, dutiful, and quick to serve their voters. They were knowledgeable concerning their duties and protocols for performance and ballot assurance.

All polling places visited offered adequate access and accommodation to the voters.

Yuba Community College in Woodland was a combined polling site for two precincts. Each polling site had a separate table, A and B. There was significant crowding with long lines observed at each table. Voter confusion was observed regarding which line was to be used for their precinct table. Some voters discovered they were in the wrong line when they got to the table. A number of voters were observed studying the displayed maps with confusion and uncertainty and required assistance by the polling precinct staff. The temperature was uncomfortably hot.

Davis Veterans Memorial Center was also a combined polling site for two or more precincts, with two tables. Crowded conditions with confusion about which line was appropriate were also observed. The air was stuffy.

St. Martin's Episcopal Church was a combined polling place, with each table serving multiple precincts. Confusion about which line was appropriate was observed.

From observations by the Grand Jury and comments from voting site staff, it appears as though polling machines designed for the visually impaired were barely utilized. Of all sites visited in Yolo County, only one site in Esparto reported that this type of machine was used.

Other Information as Related by Precinct Polling Staff

In Knights Landing, although disabled access was available through the firehouse, curbside voting was also available to ease comfort level.

In Zamora, a 4-H club was going to meet on election night in an adjacent room to watch the voting process.

In Clarksburg, it was noted that several grade school classes came to the voting precinct to learn firsthand about the voting process.

As the polls neared closing at a precinct in Davis, younger voters who appeared to be of student age were observed rushing in to meet the time deadline of 8:00 pm.

FINDINGS

- F1. Staff and administrative management at the Elections Office conducted operations in a professional and responsible manner, promoting equal access with unbiased vote recordation, counting procedures and protocol.
- F2. The use of combined polling precincts that contained two separate sign-in tables (A and B) set up within the same room resulted in crowding and confusion. This became increasingly apparent when voter density rose (for example, after work). The crowding increased the likelihood of uncomfortable facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The Grand Jury recommends that the Elections Office consider having one staff member at locations with multiple precincts, assisting voters to the proper precinct table.

- R2. The Grand Jury recommends that the Elections Office explore additional ways to separate combined multiple polling precincts to assist the voters, improve crowd management and identify ways to keep the voting rooms from becoming uncomfortable.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933(c) and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

From the following governing body:

Yolo County Clerk Recorder (Findings F1 and F2; Recommendation R1 and R2)