



THE CITY OF ASPEN

PRESS RELEASE

Mayoral Vote Tally Corrected; Outcome Stays the Same

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ASPEN, COLO. (May 28, 2009) – City staff recently learned of an error in the tabulation of the final-round vote totals for mayor; however, the error had no effect on the outcome of the race held in Aspen on May 5, 2009. Vote totals in all other rounds of the mayor’s instant runoff voting tally and in all rounds of the two council tallies were unchanged.

“City staff has been working to audit the instant runoff process, and the tabulation error was recently discovered by TrueBallot, the company hired by the city to perform the election,” said City Clerk Kathryn Koch. “The error arose because the voting software was originally written to support the ‘ranked choice’ form of elections used in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Following Cambridge rules, the software prevented a candidate who had reached the winning threshold from receiving any more votes.”

This difference can’t affect who wins the race, but it did affect the vote totals for the winner and runner-up in the final round. The error did not occur in either of the council tallies.

In the mayor’s race the threshold necessary to be sure of a victory was 1,273, which is 50 percent plus one of the 2,544 ballots cast. When Mick Ireland, the candidate winning the mayoral contest, reached 1,273 after LJ Erspamer was eliminated in the final round of counting, he was guaranteed to win. The software stopped counting any additional votes for him. However, any such ballots ranking Marilyn Marks after Ireland were added to her final round totals.

Ireland ultimately received 28 votes beyond the threshold of 1,273. Sixteen of them had been counted for Marks, and 12 had been deemed “exhausted” because they did not list rank Marks.

The overall effect of this correction is that instead of Ireland defeating Marks by a vote of 1,273 to 1,140 (52.8 percent to 47.2 percent) as earlier reported, Ireland actually won by a margin of 1,301 to 1,124 (53.6 percent to 46.4 percent).

The election results are summarized on the City’s website at <http://www.aspenpitkin.com/depts/38/>.

“The fact that this error was detectable using election data we made available to the public validates our approach to election transparency and integrity,” said Koch. “By starting with a paper ballot that was counted independently on two different systems and by creating an electronic record of the rankings on every single ballot, we were able to audit and document this election more completely than any other public election that we have held. By making the rankings and all other election data public, everyone had the opportunity to double-check the IRV tallies themselves.”

The first step in auditing this election was to randomly select 10 percent of the ballots and make sure that the rankings on the ballots corresponded to the electronic records. This was completed on Thursday, May 7, and produced no anomalies. The second step was to manually verify that every ranking was tallied correctly for mayor and council. That is how the tabulation error was discovered and reported to the public.

Aspen City Council has committed to a review of instant runoff voting and its procedure at a work session to be scheduled this summer.

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