

June 11, 2014

FROM: Chris Jerdonek, Commissioner  
TO: Elections Commission;  
Director of Elections John Arntz

SUBJECT: June 3, 2014 Election Observations

This document contains a list of personal observations about the June 3, 2014 Primary Election. On Election Day I was a polling-place inspector. Before Election Day I attended both an experienced-inspector training class and an "equipment lab" session for polling-place workers. After Election Day I observed the public random selection of precincts in Room 48 of City Hall as well as the public manual tally at the Pier 48B warehouse.

On the whole, I thought the election was conducted superbly. Many aspects of the election were commendable. For example--

- The poll-worker training class was outstanding, as it has been in previous years. The trainer was friendly, clear, articulate, organized, and knowledgeable. The brief instructional videos, "pop quizzes," and hands-on, group practice sessions with the machines interspersed throughout the class all helped to keep things lively and make the information "stick" for the attendees.
- Before, during, and after Election Day, all of the Department employees that I interacted with were always exceedingly friendly and helpful. On Election Day, the FED for my precinct and the Election Center were both responsive and helpful.
- The Department managed a drop-in "equipment lab" in City Hall for poll-workers to receive additional hands-on training to learn and further hone their Election Day skills. The atmosphere of the equipment lab was inspiring. The room bustled with participants when I attended, and everyone seemed engaged in the process of learning.
- I am continually impressed year after year with the creativity and steady improvement in election-day processes for poll-workers. For example, the new color inspector workbook, the new color-coded closing bags, the new blue closing seals (in place of the white stickers that needed to be signed), the new instructional videos, and the new supply kit with individual, labeled compartments all made working the polls easier and more efficient than the last time.
- Even though voter turnout was low (29.7% of registered voters at the time of this writing), I was very happy with the improved outreach efforts that the Department made, including the excellent "Be A Voter" campaign. Mailing the election postcards to all resident addresses (and not just voting households) was an excellent idea. I was also happy to see "Be A Voter" billboards throughout San Francisco.
- I was very impressed with the new "Be A Voter" video PSA (available on YouTube). Watching the video gave me chills, and the soundtrack was especially excellent.

- The new web site resources like the eData graphs and Vote-by-Mail Ballot Status Lookup tool are very helpful and innovative.
- The warehouse at Pier 48B was spacious, clean, and organized.
- Overall, the professionalism and organization of the Department was inspirational.

For brevity, the remainder of this document focuses on things that I thought provide opportunities for improvement. Many of these items are minor, so I marked with a double star (\*\*) those that I thought were most important.

Finally, the observations below should not take away from my main view that the election was conducted very well overall. My intent with the below is to provide constructive feedback that can be used as the basis for future discussion and even more improvement to an already excellent operation.

## Board of Supervisor communications

I marked the following two items as important because both items are requirements of the San Francisco Charter (see SF Charter, Sec. 13.104.5).

- **\*\*Employee waiver.** The employee waiver that Director Arntz requested and that the Commission approved at its April 16, 2014 meeting was not placed on a Board of Supervisors agenda for approval until the agenda of the Board's June 10, 2014 meeting, which was one week after Election Day.
- **\*\*Sheriff's transportation and security plan.** The Sheriff's transportation and security plan that the Commission voted at its May 21, 2014 meeting to forward to the Board of Supervisors does not seem to have been received by the Board of Supervisors as of the Board's June 10, 2014 meeting agenda. I have not yet seen it listed on a Board agenda under "Communications."

## Web site

- **\*\*Preliminary Statements of Votes.** The daily Preliminary Statements of Votes posted on the Department web site were provided as PDFs, but PDFs are not well-suited for numerical data. For example, it is not easy to extract data for things like sorting, graphing, aggregating, checking totals, comparing numbers across days, etc, all of which allow greater transparency. For this reason, it would be helpful if the data was provided in CSV format and/or some other open spreadsheet format.
- **Multilingual services.** The "Multilingual services" section of the Department web site mentions the services that are available to English, Chinese, and Spanish speakers but not other languages (see <http://www.sfgov2.org/index.aspx?page=862> ). For example, the page could mention that translated facsimile ballots are available at the City Hall early voting station in Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. The page could also

mention that the Department has telephone interpretation services in as many as 200 languages.

- **\*\*Enabling the public to stay informed.** It would be helpful if the Department had an email list to which members of the public could subscribe to receive public notices and other announcements (e.g. upcoming events and dates, how to be a poll worker, how to be on the Election Observer Panel, newsroom posts, etc). Currently, there doesn't seem to be an easy way for members of the public to stay informed without missing anything. The only option is to continually remember to keep checking the website.
- **Voter turnout map.** On the "Unofficial Election Results" page, clicking the "Voter turnout map" link did not do anything. My understanding from Director Arntz is that the map would be added later when the counting was mostly complete. It would be helpful if, in the interim, clicking the link displayed something like "Collecting data — Check back in a week." This way members of the public will not think the web site has an error. Additionally, the Department could notify the public when the map is ready using its outreach tools (e.g. home page, Twitter, email list as described above, etc).

## San Francisco Voter Information Pamphlet

- **Proposition A Legal Text.** On page 54 of the Voter Information Pamphlet, the Proposition A legal text is introduced with the text, "Note: Additions are single-underline italics Times New Roman; deletions are ~~strikethrough italics Times New Roman~~." However, none of the legal text was underlined or struck through. I found this confusing because it made it unclear what the changes were.

## Early voting

- **Language assistance signage.** At the City Hall early voting station, I didn't see signs stating that translated facsimile ballots were available in Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, and Vietnamese (e.g. the "We can assist you" sign), even though such ballots were available. Normal polling places had signs indicating that facsimile ballots were available.

## Election Observer Panel

The Election Observer Panel Plan (EOPP) is a document that each county submits to the Secretary of State before each election. At the May 21, 2014 Commission meeting, I stated that I had requested and seen San Francisco's EOPP and that the documents were available for viewing in the Commission's public review file.

- **Election Plan.** The Election Plan did not mention the Election Observer Panel or the EOPP. It would be helpful if the Election Plan included the main EOPP documents.
- **Inviting advocacy groups.** San Francisco's EOPP stated that letters of invitation would be distributed to advocacy groups. Also, the Election Observer Panel Outline stated that bona fide civic organizations would be extended an invitation. However, I was informed

by the Director that letters of invitation are not sent to advocacy groups. It would be good if practice matched the planning documents in this regard.

- **Number of panelists.** I learned from Director Arntz that the Election Observer Panel had only two people, both from the Civil Grand Jury. Perhaps improved publicity and outreach efforts (e.g. inviting advocacy groups) would lead to more panel applicants.

## Poll working

- **Publicizing the equipment lab to poll workers.** The Department managed a drop-in “equipment lab” for poll-workers to receive additional hands-on training. I don’t remember receiving information about the equipment lab (e.g. in my materials or at my training class).
- **Notifying inspectors of replacement poll workers.** In the process of calling the clerks listed on my Precinct Staffing Form prior to Election Day, I learned that one of my clerks had canceled. When I called the Department to report this, I learned that the Department had a newer list of clerks for my precinct. In other words, my list of poll workers was out of date. If the list of clerks changes after the Precinct Staffing Form has already been printed, it would be helpful if the Department proactively called inspectors with the updated clerk information. This way, inspectors will not need to contact clerks that have already canceled, and inspectors will not need to call the Department to report a canceled clerk and request a replacement.
- **Training Manual Break Schedule sheet.** The Poll Worker Training Manual contains a break schedule sheet that, when filled out, shows when each poll worker can take a break throughout Election Day. It is helpful for poll workers to be able to see this sheet throughout the day. I wound up tearing out my break schedule sheet and taping it to the wall. It would be helpful if this process was thought through for inspectors.
- **The word “contest” in the Ballot Clerk script.** Several voters (perhaps five in my precinct) were confused by the word “contest” appearing in the Job Card 2 Ballot Clerk script (see Training Manual, p. 43). Specifically, the script read, “Please check both sides of the ballot cards for contests...” The confused voters would say things like, “Contest? What’s a contest?” I understand the confusion because candidate races and ballot measures are not normally called “contests” in the media, etc.
- **Provisional voters with both ID-required and VBM issued.** At one point on Election Day, a person without a VBM ballot came to vote and had both “ID-required” and “VBM issued” by their name. I called the Election Center for instruction. I was surprised that the Election Center did not instruct me to ask the voter for an ID. I was also surprised that the provisional envelope did not have an “ID provided” checkbox for such voters.
- **Blue closing seals.** The Election Day closing procedures require the inspector to seal a number of bags with blue closing seals. Initially, these seals would not stay sealed after clicking them shut. I eventually learned this was because the picture showing how to seal the blue seals (Training Manual, p. 69) was backwards.

## Live Stream of Vote-by-mail Processing

The Department web site contained a web page with two live video stream of vote-by-mail processing.

- **Publicizing the live stream.** While the live stream web page could be found using the search box, I didn't see a way for members of the public to discover the page without knowing about the page in advance. Publicizing a link would make it easier for members of the public to find out about the live video feed:  
<http://www.sfgov2.org/index.aspx?page=4080>
- **Ads.** The live stream video feeds are periodically interrupted by video ads. This affects the public transparency of the video feed because during these ads, the viewer cannot see what is happening in the rooms being filmed.

## Post-election Manual Audit (Random Selection and Manual Tally)

The post-election manual audit is described in California Elections Code section 15360.

- **Election Plan.** The Election Plan did not mention the random selection of precincts; it did not describe what method would be used to select the precincts, nor say when the selection would take place (to the extent that the day and time can be known in advance). The Election Plan also did not say what ballots would be included in the manual audit (for example, whether all vote-by-mail ballots would be included, or just the vote-by-mail ballots scanned on or before Election Day). It also did not say what audit method would be used (e.g. which of the two methods described in Elections Code sections 15360(a)(1) and (2)).
- **Schedule of Observable Activities.** The "Schedule of Observable Activities" given to the Election Observer Panel and the Elections Commission did not include the random selection of precincts or public manual tally.
- **Publicizing of manual tally.** The public manual tally started on Monday, June 9, 2014. Nothing was on the Department web site about the public manual tally the weekend before it would take place. A notice did appear in the "newsroom" section of the site earlier in the week, but later it was gone.
- **Random selection method.** The random selection of precincts seemed unnecessarily time-consuming. It took about 40 minutes to prepare the approximately 576 cards for drawing (i.e. to read each card aloud, display it, fold it, drop it into the cardboard box, and then mix all of them). The length of this process also made it difficult for members of the public to follow along on the provided papers and confirm that the numbers on the cards matched what was being said. It would be helpful if a faster and more convenient method of choosing random numbers were used.
- **\*\*Ballots included in manual audit.** While observing the public manual tally at Pier 48B, I learned that only the ballots counted on or before Election Day are included in the

post-election manual audit (i.e. only ballots contributing towards the Election Night totals). In particular, no ballots counted using the 400-C after Election Day are included. California Elections Code section 15360 (and section 362) says that the post-election audit should include all ballots counted using an electronic system.