



Snohomish County Elections

A Division of the Auditor's Office

Garth Fell

County Auditor

Matthew Pangburn

Elections and Voter Registration Manager

July 1, 2021

Lois Wentink, Chair

Everett Districts Now Ad Hoc Committee

Ms. Wentink,

As we discussed on Tuesday, June 29, there was an error on initial ballots issued to military and overseas voters registered in the City of Everett.

Snohomish County Elections issued ballots to military and overseas voters on Friday, June 18. 658 voters were mailed paper ballots and 423 voters were emailed a link where they could download their ballot.

On Sunday, June 20 we were notified that the ballots issued to City of Everett military and overseas voters contained the primary races for both City of Everett Council District 3 and City of Everett Council District 5 positions. Only City of Everett Council District 3 voters should have had the City Council District 3 race on their ballot. Only City of Everett Council District 5 voters should have had the City Council District 5 race on their ballot.

Upon receiving the notice, the online ballot link was deactivated preventing any additional ballots to be downloaded until the issue could be resolved. We then investigated to determine the root cause of the issue.

Our investigation determined that the race had been improperly defined in our election management and ballot design systems. The staff assigned to set and proof this process had incorrectly interpreted the requirements of the City of Everett Council District Positions 1 through 5. The race had been set to limit candidates for City Council Positions 1 through 5 to just those who live within each City Council District's boundaries and to allow anybody within the City of Everett to participate in voting of all city council members. This of course was not correct.

Armed with this information, staff corrected the race definition on Monday, June 21 to limit candidates for City Council Positions 1 through 5 to just those who live within each City Council District's boundaries and to limit those that can vote for City Council Positions 1 through 5 to just those who live within each specific City Council District's boundaries.

After proofing the systems and the ballots, the online ballot link was reactivated. We were able to identify that fewer than 11 voters had accessed the system during the time the ballot was incorrect. We emailed those voters with instructions on how to download and resubmit an updated ballot.

The 658 City of Everett military and overseas voters who were initially issued paper ballots were also reissued corrected ballots. These ballot packets also included an insert that contained an explanation of the situation and instructions on how to resubmit an updated ballot.

Our systems are designed to ensure that only one ballot is accepted for each voter. If the voter returns the first ballot issued that contained both city council district primaries, only the race that the voter is eligible for, if any, will be counted.

It is important to understand that no voters were missing a race that they should have had on their ballot and no races will be counted for which a voter is not eligible. Again, this issue was limited to City of Everett military and overseas voters only. The remaining 60,000 ballots to local City of Everett voters will be mailed on July 15 and will be the corrected ballot.

In regard to our communication on this issue, while Snohomish County Elections has not issued a press release or posted a general comment on our county website or social media pages, we are certainly speaking openly about it as is evidence of your knowledge and my willingness to continue to discuss this issue. We have talked to City of Everett District 3 and 5 Primary candidates, Everett's Mayor, County Councilmember Dunn who represents Everett voters and others. We also mailed an explanation and instructions to all affected City of Everett military and overseas paper ballot voters as well as emailed an explanation and instructions to affected City of Everett military and overseas email voters.

Our decision to not put out a broad press release is based on the fact that the issue was limited to a select number of military and overseas voters and the issue will not result in any voter disenfranchisement. We are also trying to avoid generating confusion among the 60,000 unaffected City of Everett voters as well as the 456,000 unaffected other county voters

We are disappointed and sorry that this mistake happened and appreciate the voter who promptly brought this to our attention. We are evaluating what can be done to prevent this or a similar issue from happening in the future.

In the meantime, I appreciate your efforts to share accurate, balanced information because voters can and should have confidence in their elections in Snohomish County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gmfell". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Garth Fell
Snohomish County Auditor