

## AN ELECTIONS ADMINISTRATORS PERSPECTIVE

### Gaining Perspective

I am saddened by the recent discussions of "rigged elections" perpetuating our media. These statements are hurtful to an elections administrator and it's hard not to take them personally.

I've spent my entire career conducting elections and facilitating the fundamental right to vote. Nothing hits home harder than attacks on the democratic institution I've spent my life's blood, sweat and tears working to protect. I have a deep respect for the foundation upon which this country elects its leaders and I know that my job as an elections administrator is key to ensuring the integrity of this democratic process.

### The right of free speech!

Media entities routinely monitor and publicly criticize government activity. As such, media can play a key role in enabling citizens to monitor the actions of elected officials and to use the information in their voting decisions. One might argue that this can lead to government which is more accountable and responsive to its citizens' needs.

Media also has the power to undermine the legitimacy of our democracy by disseminating information that attacks the credibility of the electoral process. Studies support that the presence of critical media is associated with public trust in elections and may be damaging to our democratic institution and its mission to improve the quality of election administration. Because of this, media entities should exercise their first amendment right with extreme caution and recognize the influence they have with respect to citizens' trust in the integrity of elections.

### How do you measure trust?

Citizens develop their evaluations of elections either through 1) personal experiences of the electoral process or 2) information gathered from a variety of media sources, political parties and informal conversations.

As elections administrators, we believe the citizens' trust in elections is also affected by the perceived neutrality of the elections administrators and their expected capability to ensure they abide by the laws and rules. Knowing transparency is the lynchpin of electoral credibility, elections administrators work hard to educate voters and the media on the elections process, invite them to tour our facilities and observe the process in order to bring transparency to every facet of the elections process.

## Defenders of Democracy

Elections administrators are professionals who are passionate about their work and democracy's first responders. The voter's confidence in the process is paramount to election administrators and our biggest fear is voters losing faith in America's election system.

Elections administrators don't just issue ballots and check signatures; we interface with candidates, campaigns and the media, engage lawmakers, and interact with our peers from around the country to solicit best practices and innovation. We know voting equipment is critical infrastructure in this country, as critical as roads and bridges, and we work continuously to improve the efficiencies and security of this critical infrastructure through technology and best practices.

## Final Canvass

In all my 25 years of elections administration, I've never experienced a time of such fragility of the voter's faith in the elections process. The voter's confidence matters. Trust in the voting process matters.

It has been an honor to serve the voters of Cowlitz County and I am dedicated to protecting the elections systems they've come to accept, understand and trust. I am proud to serve with professionals who I consider guardians of our country's voting systems and we are worthy of the voter's trust.

Kristina Swanson  
Cowlitz County Auditor