

**December 20, 2004**

MAKING VOTES COUNT

## Count Every Vote

**E**very vote is supposed to count in America, but candidates too often maneuver to disqualify votes that they think might go to the other side. A month and a half after Election Day, battles are still raging in Washington State and in San Diego over whether to count all of the votes that were cast. The answer to that question must be yes.

In Washington's gubernatorial election, Dino Rossi, a Republican, and Christine Gregoire, a Democrat, finished in a virtual dead heat. With nearly 2.9 million votes cast, Mr. Rossi initially led by 261 votes. A machine recount took his lead down to 42. Ms. Gregoire requested a hand recount. During it, King County, a heavily Democratic area that includes Seattle, found 723 absentee ballots that had not been counted because election workers made errors like failing to verify the voters' signatures.

Republicans, fearing that those ballots would throw the election to Ms. Gregoire, have gotten a lower court judge to prevent them from being counted, at least temporarily. But there is no reason these ballots and other valid ballots that have turned up during the recount should not be counted. The right to vote cannot be taken away because an election official did not do his or her job correctly.

In San Diego, the No. 2 choice of the voters for the mayor's job may be headed to City Hall. Donna Frye, a write-in candidate, came within 2,108 votes of defeating Mayor Dick Murphy. But Ms. Frye's vote total does not include more than 5,500 ballots on which voters wrote her name, but failed to darken a bubble next to it. There can be no doubt that those voters, who would easily give Ms. Frye a majority, tried to vote for her, but were tripped up by poor ballot design. The voters' intent should be recognized.

In Ohio, where a recount of the presidential election is under way, it is becoming clear that as important as recounts are, they are not enough to ensure the integrity of our elections. Representative John Conyers Jr., a Democrat from Michigan, has charged that an employee of a company that makes vote-counting software used across the state may have tampered with one county's vote tabulator after the election to make the recount come out right. If people other than election officials have free access to the tabulation software, it can make a recount an empty gesture.

Clearly the American election system needs significant improvement, starting with voter-verified paper

trails for every vote cast electronically. In the current flawed system, the best chance we have of producing accurate results is to be on guard for manipulation of electronic voting machines and tabulation software, and to conduct conscientious recounts when the outcome is at all in doubt.

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