

County ready for recount

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10:05 am

JEFFERSON — Starting Thursday, ballots cast in the Nov. 8 presidential election will be recounted by hand in Jefferson County.

Recounting the 43,447 ballots cast in the county will cost an estimated \$131,500, according to Jefferson County Clerk Barb Frank.

She said her office is prepared for the task.

“I tried to think of everything and put the kitchen sink in there,” she quipped. “There are supplies, security that I have to call in on Saturday; there is an attorney we have to present. It adds up in a hurry.”

Donald Trump beat Hillary Clinton by about 22,000 votes in Wisconsin, but Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein has alleged — without evidence — that the results might have been hacked in a cyberattack. She asked for a recount last week.

However, Dane County Circuit Court Judge Valerie Bailey-Rihn concluded that Stein’s attorneys failed to show any hard evidence the machines were attacked and are unreliable.

The Wisconsin Election Commission had to grant Stein’s request for a recount under state law, but refused another Stein request that the commission order all county clerks to recount the votes by hand, leaving it up to the counties to decide how to conduct the process.

Stein filed a lawsuit seeking a judge’s order for a hand recount, which was denied. Clinton’s campaign joined the action Tuesday, saying she has a stake in the results.

Despite the hand recount not being mandated statewide, only 19 of the state’s 72 counties plan to use electronic tabulators instead of counting by hand, Elections Commission Administrator Mike Hass said.

Either way, Jefferson County had planned to proceed with a hand count anyway because the machines already had been utilized before.

“We’ve done that once, so I see no point to it,” she said. “Part of it is I would like to be able to say that ‘yes, they’re right, it matches.’ To me, if we are going to spend all this time, money and effort on it — I don’t care whose money it is — you might as well accomplish something.

“I don’t have 120,000 ballots (to count), so I can say that,” Frank said, comparing her totals to other counties.

Thus, Jefferson County expects to easily make the recount deadline of Monday, Dec. 12. The Elections Commission will review the totals before certifying the vote on Dec. 13, the federal deadline. The last countywide recount occurred following the 2011 state Supreme Court race between Justice David Prosser and challenger JoAnne Kloppenburg.

“That is actually very helpful,” Frank said. “It is not like we are developing forms here. We are taking forms we developed then and adapting them to this one. It is not like starting from scratch.”

Jefferson County’s recount will get under way on Thursday at 8 a.m. in Room 202 at the Jefferson County Courthouse. As a courtesy, Frank said, the county is requesting that the municipal clerks and a chief elections inspector be present for the recount.

She said the first set of ballots to be counted will be from the City of Watertown, since it is divided between two counties.

“I’m just doing it based on when people have availability because I want the (city, village or town) clerks to be able to come, so if there is any questions on their municipalities, they are there to answer them,” she said.

A rough schedule has been set with the municipal clerks.

“I just don’t know how many to schedule because I just don’t know how long it is going to take to count,” she said.

Plans are to work from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Thursday and Friday, 8 a.m. to noon on Saturday and then resume counting on Monday.

“We have two groups of people, one of which is the Jefferson County Board of Canvass made up of myself, Marcia Bare and Marge Ashburn,” Frank said. “The tabulators are people that I appoint. They will be doing the actual physical counting of the ballots and the candidates and the votes cast.”

She said the tabulators are made up of election inspectors (pollworkers) and others who have contacted her with an interest in assisting.

The county clerk said the workers will be receiving \$55 for a four-hour shift. She has people scheduled through next Friday.

Frank said there will be three tables of counters, while the Board of Canvass members reconcile the pollbooks and the absentee ballot log.

Jefferson County electors gave President-elect Donald Trump and Vice President-elect Mike Pence 23,410 ballots for 54.59 percent of the total. Democrat Hillary Clinton and running mate Virginia U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine received 16,561 for 38.61 percent of the total.

The county vote counts for others vying for the top administrative post were: Constitution Party candidate Darrell L. Castle and running mate Scott N. Bradley, 179 votes; Libertarian Party candidate Gary Johnson and Bill Weld, 1,660; Wisconsin Green Party candidate Jill Stein and Ajamu Baraka, 462; Workers World Party candidate Monica Moorehead and Lamont Lily, 29, and American Delta Party candidate Rock Roque De La Fuente and Michael Steinberg, 26. There were 560 write-ins.

In Jefferson County, the majority of municipalities favored Trump. Clinton carried the cities of Fort Atkinson, Whitewater and Lake Mills and towns of Lake Mills and Oakland.

The two candidates were separated by only 88 votes in the Town of Sumner with Trump taking the lead. Similarly, there was a 69 vote difference in the City of Waterloo again with the president-elect earning the most ballots.

Meanwhile, Debbie Greenberger, one of Stein's attorneys, told reporters after the judge's ruling Tuesday that Stein would consider appeal options. In the meantime, she said hopes the counties take to heart the judge's remarks about a hand recount being the best way to proceed.

Stein has raised \$6.4 million online since last week to cover recounts in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. She griped about Wisconsin's costs being exorbitant but paid the money with five minutes to spare Tuesday. That payment cleared the way for the recount to begin Thursday.

Independent presidential candidate Roque De La Fuente withdrew his request for a Wisconsin recount Tuesday, saying the process would cost too much.

Today, Clinton's aides and supporters are urging dispirited Democrats to channel their frustrations about the election results into political causes — just not into efforts to recount ballots..

Clinton and her close aides see the recount drive largely as a waste of resources, according to people close to Clinton.

“Believe me, if there was anything I could do to make Hillary Clinton the next president of the United States I would,” said former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, a longtime Clinton supporter. “But this is a big waste of time.”

Aides say Clinton is focused on moving past her unexpected defeat and has devoted little attention to the recount or thinking about her political future. She's been spending time with her grandchildren and going for walks near her Westchester home. Sightings of Clinton hiking with her dogs and shopping at a Rhode Island bookstore went viral on social media.

“There have been a few times this past week where all I wanted to do was curl up with a good book and our dogs and never leave the house again,” Clinton said in an emotional speech at a gala for the Children’s Defense Fund, her one public appearance since her loss.

Former President Bill Clinton, meanwhile, has been poring over the election results, second-guessing decisions by top campaign aides and intensely trying to figure out how his wife lost the white working-class voters who were the base of his electoral coalition, say people familiar with the campaign.

Clinton’s team was aware of possible discrepancies soon after the election, telling top donors on a conference call four days after the election that they were looking into potential problems in the three states.