

November 2015

Department of Elections Certifies Election Results **Mayor Without Mandate**

by Patrick Monette-Shaw

When the Department of Elections (DOE) certified results of San Francisco's municipal election on November 19, I wanted to sympathize with our so-called "consensus Mayor," Ed Lee. I dredged the barrel, but couldn't find a drop of sympathy.

Lee managed re-election gaining just over a simple majority of votes, in the end capturing under his own sails just 51.85% (105,298) of the 203,069 total ballots cast on November 3.

That's not much of a vote of confidence, or a mandate, following on the heels of having barely won a 30.72% plurality (just 59,663 votes) out of 194,029 votes cast when he was first elected mayor in November 2011.

When DOE posted preliminary election results November 3 at 10:36 p.m., it reported Lee initially won 56.70% (70,715) of the 124,726 of ballots cast for Mayor, while the "1-2-3 to Replace Ed Lee" coalition — Amy Farah Weiss, Francisco Herrera, and Stuart "Broke-Ass" Schuffman — snagged fully 35.75% (44,594) of initial votes. Election night, 7,536 ballots cast no vote for mayor at all.

By adding in 8,964 votes cast for two other official candidates, 453 ballots cast for "unqualified" (defined as not official) write-in candidates, and 7,536 ballots not cast for mayor at all, Lee's 70,715 votes drooped by 3.23%, to just 53.47% of the 132,262 total ballots cast first reported on election day.

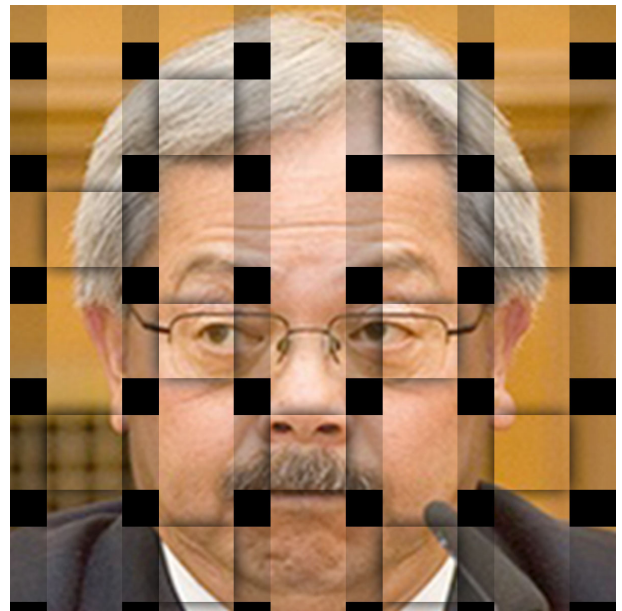
DOE Certifies Election Results

Fast forward to November 19, when DOE released certified election results. Mayor Lee drooped lower, garnering just 51.85% of the 203,069 total ballots cast, a 4.85% slide downward from 56.7%. The "1-2-3 to Replace Ed Lee" coalition surged to 69,948 votes of the 85,099 (41.91%) ballots cast for mayor other than Ed Lee, including 13,387 votes cast for two other official candidates (Kent Graham and Reed Martin), 59 votes for the six official "certified" write-in candidates, and a staggering 1,705 votes cast for the so-called unqualified write-in candidates who didn't register as "official" write-in candidates with DOE prior to the election. Those 1,705 unofficial write-in votes likely set a new record in the City.

By the time DOE certified election results, ballots cast with no vote for any mayoral candidate at all had nearly doubled to 13,362, representing 6.24% of the 203,069 ballots cast, apparently unwilling to vote for any official candidate, also probably setting an all-time-high record of folks who bothered to vote, but failed bothering to vote for a mayor.

Beyond the final election results summary report, the Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) report revealed more information about the lack of confidence in Mayor Lee. Of the 203,069 ballots cast, just 168,232 advanced to being counted as "continuing" ballots in the final RCV results. Fully 34,837 votes — a whopping 17.16% — were tossed out and not counted by the RCV algorithm for the mayor's race.

A total of 771 ballots were eliminated as "exhausted by over votes," on which voters marked more than one candidate in the same ranked-choice column. Another 12,741 ballots were eliminated as "under votes," which includes both blank ballots (in which voters cast no vote for mayor at all) and writing in the name of someone other than pre-qualified "certified" official write-in candidates.



Election Results: While Mayor Ed Lee sought to weave a portrait of being a consensus mayor, voters didn't hand him a mandate.

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Illustration: Patrick Monette-Shaw

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Another 21,325 ballots were eliminated as “exhausted ballots,” which no longer included a “continuing” candidate because no additional ranked choice candidate names were indicated. For instance, if someone cast a single vote only for, say, Amy Farah Weiss, but didn’t include a second or third ranked-choice name, or a candidate is eliminated from advancing, the ballot is summarily deemed exhausted and not counted in RCV results.

An unintended consequence of having had albatross Julie Christensen hanging on for dear life to Mayor Lee’s tailcoats is that in District 3, Christensen may have dragged down ballots cast for Lee in the heavily Chinese-American district, given powerbroker Rose Pak’s annoyance with Lee. With an impressive 50.49% of registered voters casting votes in D-3, 17,544 of the district’s 34,559 voters cast ballots for mayor. Sadly, Ed Lee captured just 55.82% (9,798) of the 17,544 cast in District 3.

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The five official candidates, including the “1-2-3 Coalition,” snared 35.91% (6,304) of ballots cast in D-3, but fully 6.84% (1,200) voters in D-3 were “under votes” that apparently cast no vote for mayor at all, two ballots were cast for the “official” certified write-in candidates, and another 184 ballots were cast for someone other than pre-qualified “certified” official write-in candidates. Maybe the mayor isn’t as popular in Chinatown and D-3 as everyone thinks.

Lee Snags Just 30.43% of Registered Chinatown Voters

Similar results occurred in Chinatown, where 51.9% of registered voters (9,059 of 17,692) turned out to vote. Mayor Lee garnered 59.42% (5,383) of the votes cast for Mayor; all other official candidates, including the 1-2-3 Coalition, snagged 32.03% (2,902) of ballots cast; and 8.54% (774) were either ballots cast for unofficial write-in candidates, or were under-votes and over-votes. Lee’s 5,383 votes represent just 30.43% of all registered Chinatown voters, hardly a mandate, and possibly a symptom of aversion of him in his own backyard.

The candidates other than Lee cobbled together a great ranked-choice voting strategy.

The election’s certified RCV “Pass Report” on November 19 documented that of 83,936 ballots cast for all other candidates other than Lee (and excluding the 1,705 votes for “unqualified” write-in candidates) just 8.84% (7,420) ended up being transferred during the ranked-choice algorithm to Ed Lee, 31.26% (26,236) were transferred to Francisco Herrera, Herrera held on to another 34.22% (his own 28,805 original votes), and 25.41% (21,325) were exhausted by candidates not continuing whose ballots were *not* transferred to others, most importantly not transferred to Ed Lee.

As for campaign spending in the race, Mayor Lee’s Form 460 posted on the Ethics Commission’s campaign finance database for the period ending October 17, 2015 shows he had spent \$1,401,248 during 2015, 31 times more than the \$44,439 in combined spending by the “1-2-3 to Replace Ed Lee” coalition during the same period. Lee’s \$1.4 million spent garnering his 105,298 votes translates to \$13.31 per vote, whereas the \$44,439 in combined spending by the 1-2-3 Coalition garnered 60,948 votes at a cost of just \$0.64 per vote.

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The sad truth is Lee’s approval rating plunged drastically. Back on April 21, 2015, the *San Francisco Examiner* carried an [Op-Ed](#) by Larry Bush that reported Lee’s approval rating had drooped to 38%, his disapproval rating was 46%, and 16% of voters were unsure. No small wonder Lee managed to garner just 51.85% of votes cast in November 2015. It reflects little confidence in the mayor, not a mandate.

The *San Francisco Examiner’s* October 15 [editorial](#) accompanying it’s endorsements for the November 3 election reported Lee had refused to meet with the *Examiner’s* editorial board. The editorial noted it’s a shame when a sitting mayor can get away with being aloof and disengaged with the civic process during an election season, and without a greater civic dialogue about where we are going and how we intend to get there, The City loses out.

The election results show clearly Mayor Lee has no mandate from voters, just a few Emperor’s new clothes. Indeed, election results illustrate a referendum against our mayor and his many failed policies during the five years he’s served as mayor.

After all, 48.15% (97,771) of voters just couldn't bring themselves to vote for Lee as their first choice in the 203,096 total ballots cast. And with just 7,420 ballots transferred to him during RCV Lee captured just 113,191 ballots, 55.74% of all 203,069 ballots cast.

Don't for a minute believe the myth in the final RCV Pass Report that Lee received 67.28% of final RCV votes, and Francisco Herrera received 32.72%. It's a myth precisely because the denominator was reduced to just 168,232 final ballots, by creatively tossing out 17.16% (34,837) of the 203,069 ballots cast, including the 21,325 valid votes for candidates who were simply "eliminated" during "Pass 1" when those RCV votes weren't passed on to another candidate.

Had someone unafraid of billionaire Ron Conway's *Citizen's United* "money = speech" buying elections — say State Senator Mark Leno — jumped into the race for mayor, San Franciscans may have gotten a new, anyone-but-Lee mayor and we wouldn't see him grinning and jiving, and selling the City to the highest bidder, for four more years.

Hopefully, the election of Aaron Peskin as District 3 Supervisor may help restore some balance of power between the legislative and executive branches at City Hall.

If not, the only option left may be to consider quickly mounting a recall campaign against Mayor Lee, to prevent a complete sell-out of the City to his billionaire backers, including Ron Conway and his ilk, during the next four years.

“ The election of Aaron Peskin as District 3 Supervisor may help restore some balance of power between the legislative and executive branches at City Hall. If not, we may need to consider quickly mounting a recall campaign against Mayor Lee. ”

Monette-Shaw is a columnist for San Francisco's Westside Observer newspaper. He received a James Madison Freedom of Information Award from the Society of Professional Journalists–Northern California Chapter in 2012. He can be contacted at monette-shaw@westsideobserver.