



**Snohomish County
County Executive's Office**

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Reardon, Terwilliger Advance Mail-Out Ballot to County Council

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon and County Auditor Bob Terwilliger have submitted to County Council a motion to convert the County to an all mail-out election system.

“Our right to vote is one of our most fundamental rights of freedom,” said Reardon. “It is the County’s responsibility to administer the election process in a way that best protects and preserves that right for all registered voters.”

Snohomish County began taking a serious look at election process reform after the federal and state governments made improvements to the voter registration database and imposed several costly and unfunded state regulations.

“If we can increase the effectiveness and efficiency of this most important of all government services,” says Reardon, “then, we have an obligation to do so.”

According to Terwilliger, making the switch to an all mail-out ballot system would greatly enhance the integrity and reliability of Snohomish County’s election process.

“The difference between the existing combined polling and mail-in and a direct mail-out election system are not dramatic, yet they have the potential to significantly increase voter accuracy and participation,” said Terwilliger.

In a mail-out election, each registered voter would have a ballot mailed directly to their home. They would then have the option of casting that ballot via return mail or at a nearby return drop-off location. Accuracy of the registered voter database would increase as addresses and voter names are cross-checked at every election.

Today, 32 out of 39 counties have moved to all mail-out ballot elections. According to Terwilliger, Counties in Washington State that have moved to the all mail-out election system have experienced increased voter participation.

As of January 1, 2006, 213,849, 60% of Snohomish County's registered voters vote by mail and current forecasts predict that by November 2008 approximately 304,746 or 80% of all registered voters will be voting by mail.

While a switch to an all mail-out ballot may not have a dramatic impact on the voting population, it would significantly reduce the cost to the County of maintaining polling locations. Due to recent additional costs imposed by Federal and State government, the cost to Snohomish County to maintain existing polling locations would increase by \$1,032,500 starting January 2006.

If the County Council approves the motion, all mail-out ballot elections in Snohomish County would commence with the September 2006 primary. The County Auditor has committed to provide polling place elections for all special elections for the months of February, March, April and May 2006.

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