Reed projects 51 percent Washington voter turnout

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : October 20, 2009 at 9:30 am

Voter turnout should be a respectable 51 percent for the General Election that is now under way across Washington, Secretary of State Sam Reed predicted Tuesday.

This off-year election follows a record-high turnout of 85 percent in last year’s hotly contested presidential-gubernatorial election year. With no statewide contests or congressional battles on the ballot this year to spur voter interest, the turnout should be about average for an off-year, Reed said. As of Oct. 12, Washington has 3,575,498 registered voters. More than 50,000 registrations have been culled from the rolls since last November’s record registration of over 3.63 million.

Records for the past four decades show that odd-year turnouts average around 51 or 52 percent, with some higher spikes in years with multiple controversial ballot measures. An assortment of good local races, a pair of hotly debated state ballot measures, and the popularity of vote-by-mail should keep this year’s turnout on pace, Reed said.

Some counties surveyed by the state Elections Division said they expect to exceed the Secretary’s prediction. King County, which has open races for County Executive and Seattle Mayor that are generating a lot of attention, is expecting 56 percent, for instance. On the other hand, some large counties’ projections are lower: Spokane, 50; Pierce, 45; and Clark, for instance. At the other end of the spectrum, Clallam is hoping for a 70 percent turnout.

Reed, the state’s chief elections official, said a pair of significant ballot measures, local government races, and scattered legislative and judicial races provide plenty of good reasons to vote.

“It is important that we all follow up on all of the great enthusiasm we experienced in the 2008 elections, and that we stay engaged in our communities and help make wise choices in these difficult economic times,” said Reed.

“The election this year features our choices for local government, our mayors and council members, our county leaders, our port commissioners and others who will face crucial decisions in the days and months ahead,” said Reed, who remains an advocate for local government after spending more than 22 years as Thurston County’s auditor before being elected to his current post in 2000. “Our local governments are the level closest to our daily lives, affecting everything from potholes and transportation projects to budget priorities and the future of our schools and our ports.”

Reed said many voters are “perfect” voters and take pride in casting ballots every single election. This year, others will be drawn by two heavily debated statewide ballot measures:
--Referendum 71, domestic partner benefits. This measure asks voters to approve or reject domestic partnership legislation that passed the Legislature last spring.

--Initiative 1033, revenue limits. This measure proposes capping annual growth in city and county general funds, with excess revenue dedicated to property tax relief.

Nearly all of the state is voting by mail, including populous King County, which switched earlier this year. Pierce County retains some poll sites, but most Pierce voters cast ballots by mail. The convenience and popularity of ballots automatically arriving at voters’ home boosts turnout statewide, Reed said.

Ballots went out over the weekend, and must be postmarked by Election Day, November 3.

Reed is challenging the voters to outshine the predictions.

“It’s sad to think of nearly half the electorate sitting this one out, particularly when so much is at stake,” he said. “Your voice is needed,” Reed said.