

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCERhttp://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/273692_logan13.html**County elections director resigns****In response, Sims says that he will delay the new all-mail voting system***Tuesday, June 13, 2006***By NEIL MODIE**
P-I REPORTER

Dean Logan, the politically battle-weary director of King County elections, is resigning to take the No. 2 elections job in Los Angeles, prompting County Executive Ron Sims to delay moving the county to a virtually all-mail voting system.

In an interview Monday, Logan said a factor in his decision to leave his job as director of the Records, Elections and Licensing Services Division was the "toxic environment" surrounding the elections operation. It heated up after the contested 2004 governor's election and intensified again recently over Sims' vote-by-mail plan.

Sims has planned for an August 2007 rollout of the vote-by-mail system, which the County Council, after several delays, is scheduled to vote on next week. But he said Logan's departure, coupled with other vacancies in the elections office, "is a major setback for us on vote by mail."

"I think the earliest we're going to achieve it now is 2008. ... We're going to be very methodical, and I'm not even guaranteeing we'll do it in 2008," the executive said.

The job of elections superintendent under Logan has been vacant for a year, and a number of vacancies exist in the department. Sims said they have been difficult to fill because of the negative publicity.

In a letter to Sims Monday announcing his resignation, Logan said one of the factors was "the continuing struggle to manage the ... division in what remains a highly politicized and divided structure. ...

"My personal and professional disappointment in the recent incivility and disrespectful nature of proceedings with the County Council related to the vote-by-mail proposal has further exaggerated that dynamic," Logan wrote.

Sims, in an interview, added, "I think Dean's concern was that the environment had become so politically toxic that he felt that even if he succeeded, he wouldn't be beyond criticism for political reasons, and he didn't want to feel there was no upside to remaining.

"He's always been in demand (for jobs elsewhere) and he's always been held in high esteem by elections people from around the country," Sims said.

Logan, 38, who has run King County elections since September 2003, is leaving effective July 14 to become chief deputy to the Los Angeles County registrar-recorder/county clerk, ConnyMcCormack, who has the largest elections jurisdiction in the country.

"Professionally, this is a rare offer, and I am honored by the recognition that my work ... is a match for the challenges of such a large and complex agency," Logan wrote to Sims.



Dean Logan, faulted by some over 2004 vote, cites a "toxic environment" for his leaving.

McCormack said she has known Logan since 2001 when both served on a national election reform task force at the Election Center at Auburn University in Alabama. It was formed in the wake of the heavily litigated presidential election of 2000 -- a portent of Washington's equally close, controversial gubernatorial election of 2004.

"I've always been very impressed with Dean's intellect, his demeanor, his knowledge," McCormack said. "I just think he's a future star" in elections administration nationally.

She said she wasn't concerned about the problems Logan encountered in King County because "Dean has proven that he can handle that type of scrutiny and high profile with, I think, flying colors."

Logan has been the eye of the political storm surrounding King County's election operation, especially in the 2004 election. Problems included overlooked absentee ballots left out of the count, provisional ballots tallied without verification of voter eligibility beforehand and wide discrepancies in the records of voters voting and ballots cast.

Since then, Sims contended Monday, "the turnaround (in the elections operation) has been incredibly significant."

Republicans blamed Logan and Sims, a Democrat, for Republican Dino Rossi's 133-vote loss in the governor's election. Some council Republicans demanded Logan's resignation.

Republicans noted that Logan once was a Democratic elected official, Kitsap County clerk, although he got his current job after serving as state elections director for two years under Republican Secretary of State Sam Reed and once worked for Reed's Republican predecessor, Ralph Munro.

Political warfare broke out again over Sims' plan to make King the 35th of Washington's 39 counties to switch to all-mail voting -- a plan backed by the council's five majority Democrats but opposed by its four Republicans.

Even some council Democrats have questioned how well prepared Logan's department is for the change, even though more than 70 percent of King County voters already opt to vote by mail, and in the 2005 primary more than 81 percent did.

In the face of criticism about the security of mail voting and other concerns, the council has postponed a vote on the changeover three times.

Sims was incensed about some council members' criticism of Logan's absence from a public hearing on the vote-by-mail legislation last week, when the council again put off a decision. Logan sent two aides to testify.

Some critics also were skeptical about an explanation by Logan's aides that his absence was due to his attending a statewide election directors' meeting in Spokane, which, it turned out, didn't start until the next day.

Actually, Logan acknowledged Monday, he was in Los Angeles, observing his prospective new employer's preparations for the California primary, although he didn't accept McCormack's longstanding job offer until Sunday. Logan was in Los Angeles from that Saturday until midway through Election Day, Tuesday, and then flew to the Spokane conference to give a speech.

Logan said he had scheduled a vacation day seven weeks earlier to observe the California primary, and the council subsequently postponed action on vote-by-mail again.

He said he told several council members beforehand that he couldn't attend the June 5 hearing and e-mailed them his cell phone number.

Ironically, despite the problems Logan has faced -- and still faces -- with the elections division, he was the first director with a professional background in elections administration after a string of political appointees held that job.

His former boss, Secretary of State Reed, said that although he thinks highly of Logan, "he is not a person whose background has been in large organizations and bringing about large organizational change and cultural change."

"It was my impression then as well as now that that was what was needed in King County," Reed said.

"The situation he has been in has been an almost no-win type of situation."

DEAN LOGAN ELECTIONS CAREER

1990s: Served under Secretary of State Ralph Munro as the first manager of the state certification and training program for county elections officials.

2001: Hired by Secretary of State Sam Reed as state director of elections, overseeing voting generally and also managing signature checks on initiative petitions and producing voters' guides and pamphlets.

2003: Appointed by King County Executive Ron Sims to run county's election department.

Nov. 17, 2004: With all counties reporting, Republican Dino Rossi wins the governor's race by 261 votes. State law triggers a machine recount.

Nov. 30, 2004: The secretary of state certifies the result of the machine recount, making Rossi the winner by 42 votes.

Dec. 23, 2004: Democrat Christine Gregoire wins a final, hand recount by 129 votes.

Jan. 7, 2005: Rossi announces he will challenge the election. During the challenge, a series of embarrassing gaffes came to light in the King County elections department. They included overlooking more than 100 absentee ballots until it was too late to count them, tabulating hundreds of provisional ballots without the required verification of voter eligibility beforehand and initially failing to include the ballots of County Council Chairman Larry Phillips and hundreds of other absentee voters because their validating signatures could not be located in the computer system.

June 6, 2005: Judge John Bridges rejects Rossi's case.

June 12, 2006: Logan resigns to take a position in Los Angeles.

STATEMENT BY KING COUNTY EXECUTIVE RON SIMS

King County Executive Ron Sims today issued the following statement regarding Records, Elections and Licensing Director Dean Logan's decision to leave his current position on July 14 to become the Chief Deputy Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk for Los Angeles County, California:

"It was with great sadness that I learned of Dean Logan's decision to accept an elections position with Los Angeles County, the largest elections jurisdiction in the nation. He is a dedicated public servant and one of the most respected elections administrators in the nation. His consummate professionalism, unswerving integrity and exceptional work ethic will be sorely missed here in King County.

"While it is an incredible disappointment for King County to lose him, I am happy for Dean and his family. I have known for some time that, despite his calm and collected outward demeanor, Dean has

been personally hurt by the constant barrage of harsh personal attacks on his character and professionalism leveled by some partisan extremists and elected officials. It is truly unfortunate that some unscrupulous people bent on partisan gain have chosen to treat Dean very unfairly as they have worked to undermine confidence in our elections system.

"Still, I was pleased to learn that his strong record of service through extremely trying times has not been lost on his peers in his chosen profession. I am happy that, after so many difficult days and months in which he has displayed tremendous grace under pressure, he will now have a chance to make use of his professional skills and vast knowledge of elections procedures in a more congenial environment. On behalf of the citizens of King County, I offer him my heartfelt thanks and wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

"Replacing Dean Logan will be a challenge, and not only because individuals of his expertise in administering elections are few and far between. It has not been lost on me that despite several successful elections and three outside reviews that have praised the immense progress the department has made under Dean's leadership, our entire Elections staff continues to operate in very difficult circumstances. The toxic political environment created by some unhinged partisan critics has made recruiting professionals of Dean's caliber much more difficult.

"This is a wake up call. For the sake of the voters and the integrity of future elections I call on the County Council to rise above partisanship and establish an atmosphere of trust, collaboration and joint problem solving. We need to work together to keep the Dean Logans of the world here and not drive them out.

"Nonetheless, I am determined to ensure that the transition to a new director be a smooth one, and that all the gains we have made during Dean's tenure are not lost. I am heartened by the fact that Dean will be here over the next five weeks as we work on finding a replacement to step into what are very large shoes.

"Dean is a talented person, but he does not run elections by himself. The steady improvements and drive towards excellence have been a true partnership between the dozens of dedicated county elections staff and the thousands of volunteers who selflessly serve the public every time we cast a ballot. We have already begun the search for Dean's replacement but I have every confidence that our Elections team will step up once again in the primary and general elections and deliver fair, accurate and transparent results.

"As for the vote-by-mail transition proposal currently before County Council, my staff and I will evaluate over the next few weeks how Dean's decision to move on will affect the plan. With Dean's departure, it may not be possible to implement the plan by the 2007 primary as originally envisioned," Sims said.

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