

Out of the Archives

a newsletter from the Washington State Archives

November 2016



Office of the Secretary of State

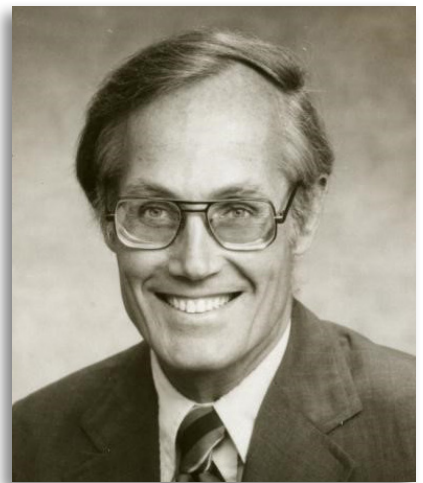
Washington held the closest major election in modern history

by Jamison Murphy, Archives Outreach

Never say your vote doesn't count. Especially here in the United States. *Especially* here in Washington.

Over 100 elections at the state level or national level have been decided by less than a 0.1% (one-tenth of a percent) margin, mostly in the United States and Canada. Seventeen of the elections tallied more than a quarter million votes and Washington accounts for two of those contests, including the narrowest.

In Washington's 2000 United States Senate race, Republican incumbent Slade Gordon was challenged by Democrat Maria Cantwell, drawing over 2.4 million votes, with results so close, a re-count was mandatory. The re-count determined Cantwell would unseat Gordon with a 2,229-vote, 0.09% margin of victory.



Former U.S. Senator Slade Gordon

2000 was a heck of a year for elections, isn't that right, ~~President~~ Mr. Gore? Well, there was one year even crazier than 2000, at least in Washington. The Cantwell-Gordon Senate race hardly compares to the drama packed into the 2004 gubernatorial decision. We all remember this close election, but, just how close was it?

In 2004, Democrat Christine Gregoire and Republican Dino Rossi's race for governor saw an automated re-count, a manual re-count, a change of winner, a call for a re-vote (which never happened), accusations of sabotage, and a lawsuit disputing the election's integrity. All that with 350,000 more total votes than the 2000 Senate election. The final re-tabulation controversially included over 500 absentee ballots, previously omitted because they were mistakenly rejected.

More than a month after the election, a 0.0045% margin lifted Christine Gregoire to the governor's mansion, winning by a mere 129 votes. Of all elections with over a quarter million votes, this was the closest.



Former Washington Governor Christine Gregoire.

There have been 16 other recorded elections with narrower margins of victory, but none close to the size of Washington's statewide elections, failing to meet the quarter-million qualifier. Adding up all the votes in those 16 elections is still less than half of either of Washington's qualifying totals. Canada has seen six elections result in a dead-even tie, the largest coming in a 38,894-vote Quebec general election in 1994. Five other state-level or national-level elections around the world have resulted in a tie, only one in the United States: Mississippi's 79th legislative district tied among 9,178 votes in the 2015 state House race, and the winner was determined by drawing straws. Seriously, they drew straws. In 2015.

So, please... vote. It matters.