Note from Commissioner Howell:

On November 16, Commissioners canvassed (certified) the November 7 general election for Sedgwick County. Voters cast a total of nearly 80,000 ballots, which is nearly 24% of registered voters in Sedgwick County. This was another great opportunity to study how elections work and focus on what is good and what needs improvement. In reviewing this year's results, I asked many questions and looked closely at the issues that emerged. I also studied the chain of custody logs and thoughtfully inspected the results. Once again, I concluded our local elections are handled professionally, and the results are accurate.

In Haysville, the outcome of the city sales tax question was razor thin. At canvass, the 10-year, $13M measure lost - 473 votes to 472. The City of Haysville wanted to verify these results and paid for a full audit.



Consequently, a group of bipartisan election workers pulled the actual paper ballots and manually recounted them, and the results did not change at all. This audit was in addition to four other randomly selected races and precincts. These manual recounts also matched the machine counts perfectly. In 2016, we purchased this election equipment because it was designed to be audited, and thus far, every audit has proven the tabulators work accurately.

Having said this, our board of canvassers did have to reject 320 provisional and mail ballots for a myriad of reasons. This percentage of rejected ballots is somewhat typical. Nevertheless, I am disappointed that several hundred voters tried to cast a ballot, but the votes didn't count, primarily because of their own mistakes. Had these voters simply registered before the deadline and voted at their assigned poll sites on Election Day, it is very likely their ballots would have been counted.

Why am I writing about this again? Because claims of election fraud are not going away. Since the general election of 2020, many Republicans have completely lost confidence in the election process because they watched the conspiracy film, "2000 Mules," or heard Mike Lindell (the My Pillow guy) talk about how sophisticated and widespread election fraud stole the last presidential election. Even though rational explanations could deflate a few concerns, there are countless other worrisome observations that underscore partisan distrust.

Ironically, the prominent leaders of the Democratic Party stated similar doubt in the results, when their nominee lost the presidential election in 2016. Not surprisingly, the victorious Republicans argued the election results were accurate in that election cycle. This is now predictable. Regardless of who wins in 2024, the

losing party will say it's only a result of widespread, undetected, sophisticated election fraud.

By now, I have probably triggered people in both major parties. Regardless of whether their nominee wins or loses, party leaders should not modify their rhetoric based on the outcome. For example, in 2019, social media circulated a quote supposedly attributed to Joseph Stalin (even though the credit is doubtful) - "... The people who *cast* the votes decide nothing. The people who *count* the votes decide everything." Many more disturbing observations and concerns, especially in other states, have convinced some people that voting is just a waste of time now because unfettered election fraud is rampant. I strongly disagree.

Since I am one of the five people in Sedgwick County who is responsible for reviewing and certifying election results, I have a deep interest in election security. Over the last two years, I developed an educational election security presentation and have testified on election legislation numerous times. Once people learn how many safeguards, cross-checks and paper trail audits are in place, most admit they feel much better about our elections.

While we cannot do much to boost voter confidence in other states, we CAN do our part locally. If something is good and right, we should declare it to be acceptable. Everything is not broken, and overall, our elections in Sedgwick County, Kansas, are accurate and secure. If you have never worked an election, I urge you to sign up by calling the Sedgwick County Election Office at 316-660-7100. It is an educational experience, and you will likely witness firsthand how well elections actually work in our community.

The views expressed by Commissioner Jim Howell in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the governing body of the Sedgwick County Board of County Commissioners or Sedgwick County Government.