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To: Jefferson County legislators and County Administrator Robert Hagemann

From: Commissioners Hall and Seymour

Date: Dec. 31, 2014

Re: 2015 Annual Report to the County Legislature in compliance with NYS Election Law 3-212(4)

While this year is supposed to be a “down year” for elections, a couple of big events ensured that our office would stay busy in 2015.

Jerry Eaton, our former Republican elections commissioner, departed after the New Year for a new opportunity in the state Unified Court System. Jude Seymour assumed the role on Feb. 11.

Commissioner Hall and the elections staff put in many hours teaching the new commissioner the intricacies of the job. This included the Munis financial software system, which the staff was simultaneously learning.

Our first big project of the year was updating our database of 3,434 street segments to include school district boundaries. Our office anticipated that the state Legislature would eventually prohibit lever machines from being used in school elections. We wanted to be ready to assist districts as they considered all of their options for administering elections, including borrowing our machines.

This street maintenance project gave us the opportunity to re-check other boundary lines as well to make sure people were voting in the correct races. It also provided us with a list of individuals who had registered under addresses that were no longer valid. One Fort Drum resident, for example, gave us Taco Bell’s address as his own.

Our second big project was to comb our database of more than 62,000 voters to eliminate those who have moved or died. Our main focus was on those who had not cast a vote since registering in

2008 or earlier. Social media sites, such as Facebook, were remarkably helpful in determining where people were currently living. We mailed letters to hundreds of individuals to let them know that we were considering canceling their registration since we believed they moved out of the county. We subsequently purged those who did not respond within the timeframe provided by state law. This will be an ongoing project, since it is beneficial to maintain registration lists that are as accurate as possible. It minimizes attempts at fraud, saves candidates valuable time while canvassing for votes and helps our office by reducing our printing and paper costs.

Our third big project was enforcing a stricter compliance of campaign finance deadlines among our candidates. In 2014, we had just 11 individuals who voluntarily submitted finance reports that are required by state law. We therefore initiated a letter campaign explaining the candidate's responsibilities and received a tremendous response. In total, 232 of the 248 candidates who were required to file a report with our office ended up doing so.

The goal remains 100 percent compliance, so that our candidates aren't subject to any state-imposed sanctions or fines.

ELECTIONS

Our office ran two elections this year – a Sept. 10 primary and a Nov. 3 general election.

We processed and reviewed 400 petitions from candidates for village, town and city offices as well as party positions. While the overwhelming majority of submissions sailed through without issue, there were a few turned in that commissioners jointly agreed to invalidate. Our office was sued over one such decision – to invalidate the minor party petitions of a district attorney candidate. Our office turned over hundreds of documents to the plaintiff and defendant so that they could review our process. We're pleased that, in the end, State Supreme Court Justice James McClusky upheld our decision.

Both our primary and general elections were executed without any major hiccups. A handful of races were too close to call on election night, prompting about a dozen candidates to visit our office to observe the recanvassing process. All were pleased with the way that our staff treated them and answered their questions.

As is the case every year, our office owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to the near 600 inspectors who attended training and the 250 who ultimately worked for us on Election Day. We also could not have done it without the men who spent the day before our elections dropping off machines and the day after retrieving our machines.

LOOKING AHEAD

There's a strong possibility that our office will run four separate elections in 2016.

Presidential primaries have already been scheduled for April 19. A potential federal primary awaits in June, followed by a state and local primary in September and the general election in November.

The state Legislature has the power to combine our federal, state and local primaries into a single date. The issue has become a political football, with Republicans and Democrats both trying to pick a date most advantageous to their party. So far, no accord has been reached.

While two-thirds of our budget covers staff salaries and benefits, we remain committed to finding additional ways to contain costs. It will surely be a challenge next year, since there may be two additional races to hold. To stay within our budget, we may open only what poll sites are necessary for the administration of elections, since inspector pay, fuel and transportation is expected to consume 40 percent of expenses that are not salaries or benefits.

Finally, three schools have so far inquired about the use of our machines for their May elections. We have no intention of running their elections, but we do plan to save taxpayer money by offering use of our machines. The commissioners are committed to making this have zero impact on our budget, as the districts will assume all costs.