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To: Jefferson County legislators and County Administrator Robert Hagemann

From: Commissioners Hall and Seymour

Date: Jan. 27, 2020

Re: 2019 Annual Report to the County Legislature in compliance with NYS Election Law §3-212(4)

The state Legislature passed 50 election-related bills in 2019, which challenged Jefferson County in myriad ways. We met those challenges head on and successfully conducted 11 days of voting to determine winners for more than 200 open seats.

We did not achieve this success in a vacuum, however. The Purchasing Department and Administration helped us with the bid process for our electronic poll books (EPBs). The IT department assisted in answering seemingly unending questions about our security posture and attended several meetings with vendors selling EPBs and related accessories. The Buildings and Grounds department cleared the second floor conference room so that we could conduct nine consecutive days of early voting and secure our machines in the adjoining room. We also had assistance from the county attorney and the treasurer's office, as well as our usual dependence on the mail department to get our absentees into the hands of voters.

The state Legislature continues building on the reforms they passed last year, and their top priority this year is to pass automatic voter registration. Other states that have instituted AVR have seen between a 9 and 94 percent increase in voter registrations, so it is difficult to predict the impact of this law on Jefferson County. (We have registered about 63 percent of the voting age population already.)

The governor has his own separate elections agenda, which includes automatic manual recounts in close elections. There are also two major changes to the state constitution that the Legislature hopes to have completed by 2022: Same day voting and “no fault absentee” or, in the governor’s parlance, “vote by mail.”

There are some laws that passed last year that will take effect for the first time in 2020, including extending each primary by six hours.

Now let us look backward.

2019 included two elections:

- The June primary for seats in villages, towns and the city of Watertown. The state Legislature moved these “local” primaries from September to June to coincide with the federal primaries. The first combined local, state and federal primary is six months from now. Turnout for the nonpartisan city mayor and council primary elections was 21.6 percent. The turnout for Republican primaries in the towns was between 9.3 percent (Worth) and 37.7 percent (Henderson).
- The November general election for more than 175 offices, including three for the 5th Judicial District, and one each for the district attorney, county treasurer and county court judge. All 15 Legislature seats were also up for election; all had just one candidate. Countywide turnout was 30.7 percent.

While the elections themselves ran smoothly, there were one or two ancillary headaches.

The elections commissioners held off on certifying the winners of the city mayoral primary until a judge resolved a disagreement. The June primary allowed this process to play out without affecting the deadline to print ballots for the general election.

Meanwhile, supply chain issues dampened our ability to train table inspectors on the new electronic poll books. It also threatened to derail our plan to deploy a full complement of books. Thankfully, Tenex – our vendor for the poll books – loaned us some iPads to use during training and the final, needed supply of printers came just four days before Election Day.

Finally, there was an \$18,000 difference between the state grants offered to Jefferson County and the true cost of acquiring electronic poll books and paying for nine days of early voting in 2019. We will continue to advocate through the Elections Commissioners Association for early voting funds, as it is important that this does not become another unfunded mandate from Albany.

Presidential election years are always taxing, and the budgets are always bigger as a result. The 27 days of early voting --- most of which will be conducted during nights and weekends – will put additional pressure on our resolve to “hold the line.”

Our voting machines are now 12 years old and are all still in service thanks to our diligent technicians and a robust service contract with our vendor. While we have advocated as an

association for the state to supply funds for machine replacements, that has not been a legislative priority.

Finally, we continue to share services with school districts in our county. We helped the Alexandria, Carthage, General Brown, Indian River, Thousand Islands and Watertown school districts by programming our machines and deploying them for their May budget votes. This saved them the cost of purchasing \$11,000 machines and hiring technicians to create their ballots and test their machines. We bill the schools for any costs we incur, so it has no fiscal impact on the county taxpayer. The schools end up paying a mere fraction of what they would have had they opted to purchase machines.