



Top 2 Primary Advisory 08: Political Party Observers July 24, 2008

Official political party observers are essential for the integrity of all state and local elections and primaries. Observers should be present as witnesses for all election processes, including ballot processing, tabulation, and recounts.

Observers do not actively participate in any election activity but must be permitted to witness activities associated with the election or primary.

Requesting and Appointing Observers

The County Auditor is required by RCW 29A.40.100, WAC 434-250-110, and WAC 434-261-020 to request official political party observers be appointed by each major political party. This request must:

- Be in writing;
- Be completed prior to initial processing of ballots;
- State the time and date that ballot processing will begin;
- Specify the number of observers requested; and
- Request designation of a supervisor if more than one observer is appointed.

It is the responsibility of major political parties to appoint their official party observers. If a party fails to appoint or observers fail to attend, the election processes and activities will continue as scheduled.

The County Auditor may refuse any appointment of an official observer, provided that the political party is promptly requested to appoint a substitute (WAC 434-261-020). Additionally, the County Auditor may request a disruptive observer to leave (WAC 434-264-030). It is beneficial to have these rights outlined in your Canvassing Board Manual or procedures.

Preparing for Observers

As mandated by RCW 29A.12.120, the County Auditor must provide training to official party observers prior to every primary or general election. Record of attendance at training must be kept to qualify observers for subsequent elections. Observers are to be instructed in:

- Proper conduct of duties;
- Rules regarding what observers may or may not do;

- Election procedures used by the election department for processing, vote tallying, and verification of accuracy;
- Verifying the accuracy of vote tabulation.
- The proper method to submit questions and objections.

All observers must be identified by roster and identification tags. If more than one observer is present at a single location, observer stations may be assigned by the County Auditor (WAC 434-261-020).

Partnering with your Observers

We encourage you to have observer guidelines detailed in your procedures prior to the observers beginning their duties. This will allow the observers and the election staff to have a clear understanding of the role and conduct of political party observers. Written guidelines will also help avoid misunderstandings and conflict.

Political party observers are part of the citizenry we serve. We need to recognize any comments or questions they have, and treat them with respect in an efficient and responsive manner. They in turn must observe, and not participate in or impede any aspects of the administration of the election.

It may be helpful to refer to WAC 434-264 for assistance in creating observer guidelines for your procedures. Official political party observers may, by mutual agreement, request a manual count of precincts or ballot batches as described in RCW 29A.60.170. Procedures for this must also be addressed in your County Canvassing Board manual.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at (360) 902-4180.