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August 21, 2006

Dear Members of the Metropolitan King County Council,

I am writing today to convey the position of the Washington State Democratic Party on the matter of an elected Auditor for King County.

The Washington State Democratic Party recognizes the critical importance of a professional Office of Records and Elections in our state's largest county. Every citizen in King County has the right to know that his or her vote will be counted correctly. We feel confident that has been the case in recent years. Our confidence is bolstered by the fact that our voting machines create a clear and recoverable paper trail that can be scrutinized in the event of a close election, as was the case in 2004.

We appreciate that the King County Office of Records and Elections is facing a crucial challenge at this time. The department experienced a very close election in 2004. That election has been analyzed both by the Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee and by The Election Center. Both bodies have issued extensive reports, and both bodies have urged the recruitment and retention of a properly staffed and trained workforce.

At this point, with the resignation of Dean Logan, the Office is searching for both a new Elections Director and a Superintendent of Elections. It is troubling that this creates uncertainty over the management of the department, at the very time that the department must respond to the recommendations of the Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee and The Election Center; and must prepare for all-mail balloting in 2007 and 2008.

It is due to this management uncertainty that the Washington State Democratic Party must oppose the proposal to move to an elected auditor **at this time**. If the Council places this measure on the ballot in 2006, and it passes, then an Auditor would be elected in 2007 and take office on January 1, 2008. One must assume that the first elected Auditor would need three to six months to assemble his or her management team. This entire process would cover the next nineteen months, during which there would be a cloud of uncertainty surrounding the office.

It is very doubtful that a highly competent and experienced election official would be willing to assume either the position of Elections Director or Superintendent in 2006, knowing that they would almost certainly be fired in 2008. If the Office labors under inexperienced management for the next 19 months, our prospects for a successful transition to vote by mail in either 2007 or 2008 are severely jeopardized. We believe that we must have an all-mail election in 2007 in order to prepare for the far greater number of ballots that will be received by an all-mail election in 2008.

The Washington State Democratic Party will support a measure in 2009 to amend the Charter to create a partisan election for a King County Auditor. By that time we believe that competent professional management will deliver successful elections and a smooth transition to all-mail balloting in both 2007 and 2008.

Sincerely,
Dwight Pelz
Chair, Washington State Democratic Party