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May 2005

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What is it with King County?

...King State has all the rights and privileges of statehood. --As proposed by Sen. Joyce Mulliken

Dear Friends:

It just doesn't pass the "smell" test say many election experts. Bob Williams with the Evergreen Freedom Foundation (EFF) agrees, alleging that lapses in election-law protocol last fall were of such magnitude—especially in King County—that it is impossible to know who received the most "legal" votes in the still contested gubernatorial race. Attorneys for State Republicans hope that Chelan County Judge John Bridges will concur and nullify the election when the matter comes before him on May 23 in Wenatchee.

Williams notes that in King County, some 667 felons voted illegally, 785 Provisional Ballots were tabulated improperly, and hundreds more ballots were tallied than there were voters. The recent disclosure of uncounted ballots from a Republican-leaning precinct near Issaquah and a "faked" Absentee Ballot Report, forced Dean Logan, King County Elections Supervisor, to concede in a pre-trial deposition that he cannot say for certain what the vote totals are in King County.

Independent investigators argue that evidence pointing to mechanisms in the King County Elections Department that preclude an accurate vote count and could influence the outcome in close elections, puts to question both the competency and the integrity of King County Elections officials—a question serious enough they say, to warrant a grand jury investigation. Although six county councilmen agree, no officer empowered to conduct an elections investigation feels obliged. Not Sheriff Sue Rahr, not Prosecutor Norm Maleng, and not even U.S District Attorney John McKay, who, on November 2, stated:

"Election fraud and voting rights abuses dilute the worth of votes honestly cast. They also corrupt the essence of our representative form of government. As crimes against both the individual and the government, they will be dealt with promptly and aggressively. Anyone who has information suggesting electoral corruption or voting rights abuses should make that information available immediately to my Office, the FBI, or the Civil Rights Division."

In compliance with that directive, EFF filed a request with the United States Department of Justice for a federal investigation of the Washington State 2004 General Election. Citing evidence of possible fraud, civil rights violations, cover-up, and failure of county authorities to carry out their responsibilities, EFF said it has been necessary to rely on private organizations and citizens to investigate, analyze, and gather such evidence.

So far, Mr. McKay dismisses the idea of a federal probe, citing lack of proof of wrongdoing—a mischaracterization of the purpose of an investigation.

In the meantime, King County Executive Ron Sims has expressed concern for his county's somewhat tarnished image—enough so, that he is asking King County voters to consider changing the name of the county.

Actually, the idea was put forth in County Council Motion No. 6461 back in 1986.

Requiring approval of the Legislature and local voters, Sen. Adam Kline (D-Seattle) agreed this year to sponsor a bill (SB 5332) permitting King County voters to rename their county **King** County—as in Reverend Dr. Martin Luther **King**, Jr.

Although House Republicans didn't buy in, the bill breezed through the Senate and was signed by Governor Gregoire on April 19. Senate solons showed remarkable constraint, turning aside a tempting amendment offered by Sen. Joyce Mulliken (R-Ephrata) granting statehood to King County, and a new name, "King State."

King was the name chosen by the Oregon Territorial Legislature in 1852, in honor of the new Vice President of the United States, William Rufus DeVane King. William was a career politician without distinction except that he was the only Vice President (or President) in history to be sworn into office while on foreign soil. He was very sick during the election campaign, and had afterwards, repaired to Cuba to recuperate. Unfortunately, his condition worsened and he died six weeks into his term.

Ironically, the reason Mr. Sims would un-crown the hapless County namesake, might be the very reason he was "honored" in the first place. Mr. King owned slaves.

While there were a few slave-owners in the territory at the time, most Oregon residents were thinking about future statehood—as a "free state." However, there was concern they would not enjoy the support of Franklin Pierce, the new President. Pierce did not personally own slaves, but was pro-choice in the matter. He supported the Compromise of 1850 and endorsed strict enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law. What to do? The Territorial Legislature decided to outlaw slavery but make it illegal for Negroes to own land. (Oh, and we have named a county up on Puget Sound, Mr. President, after your new Vice President, the distinguished gentleman from the great state of Alabama).

The recent Motion No. 6461 states in part that "...the citizens of King County believe that the ownership of another human being is an injustice against humanity..." The motion doesn't clarify that owning other human beings was outlawed in all counties in 1863.

Nevertheless, if it is true that people are reminded of slavery when they think of King County, may we suggest new icons for Jefferson County and other entities that also bear the iniquity of slavery-supporting namesakes. Pierce County, for example, could be renamed for the former Sonics forward, **Ricky** Pierce; the city of Monroe could immortalize **Marilyn** Monroe; and the State seal could bear the likeness of 60s pop-singer, **Dina** Washington.

There is one other thing that the shrewd territorial legislators didn't know about their new veep. William, it is said, was, ahem, about as openly homosexual as one could be in the late 1840s. One historian goes so far as to say he was known in social circles as a "flaming Queen."¹ Not necessarily a liability in post-modern King County.

Perhaps Mr. Sims would be wise to dial-down his efforts to stigmatize a former Vice President who was not breaking any law in his day. It could be that when those certain special interest groups learn that William probably loved more men than he owned, the County Executive may have a tough time unseating him. Tougher than holding an honest election!

Sincerely,

Rick Forcier
Executive Director

¹ Kauffman, Bill, The American Enterprise, 12/2003, pg. 50.