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Latest look still has Cummings leading in Pembroke mayor's race

🕒 August 12, 2016 👤 robesonian 📁 News 💬 0

Election results return to Raleigh
By Bob Shiles - bshiles@civitasmedia.com

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Steve Stone -

LUMBERTON — The results of the Pembroke mayoral race that began in November and continued in March will be bounced back to the state Board of Elections one more time before a winner can be declared.

Greg Cummings is still the apparent winner of the race with four ballots cast on March 15 taken out of the vote count following a more than six-hour hearing at the Robeson

County Board of Elections on Friday.

According to Patrick Pait, Robeson County's attorney who presided over the session, the local board's final results will be sent back to the state Board of Elections to review and ensure that the three-member local board met all state requirements in deciding what action to take concerning questionable votes.

"We addressed every item in the state board's order to us concerning residency of voters for future elections," said Steve Stone, chairman



of Robeson County's three-member Elections Board. "With the four improperly cast ballots that we retrieved, which were one-stop or absentee ballots, we corrected the final vote count for the March 2015 mayoral election to reflect these votes. We are forwarding our findings and complete transcript of the proceedings to the state Board of Elections for their consideration in order to get a resolution in this election.

According to Stone, of the four retrieved ballots two were for Allen Dial, one was for Theresa Locklear, and one was for Manuel Perez. None were cast for Cummings, the highest vote-getter in the race. Final vote totals were: Cummings, 351; Dial 343; Locklear 18; and Perez, 17.

"We don't know exactly when we will get the information to the state, but it will be as soon as possible," Stone said. "The state will then have a hearing to complete the process. We expect the issue will be resolved in the near future and Pembroke will have a new mayor."

G.L. Pridgen, director of the Robeson County Board of Elections, said the local board on Friday reviewed the eligibility requirements, including registration and residency, of about 20 voters. A majority of the ballots cast by these voters could not be retrieved because they were cast on Election Day rather than during the early voting period or with an absentee ballot.

The major issue before the board Friday was to determine if all voters who cast ballots in the March do-over of the November election lived within Pembroke town limits.

At the end of May, the state Board of Elections ruled that the Robeson County Board of Elections would have to resolve a protest filed by Dial. Dial, who was six votes behind Cummings in the March do-over election, had challenged the eligibility of about 30 voters. After hearing the protest, state board members questioned the status of several voters who live near Pembroke town boundaries.

Stone said recently that there was a discrepancy between what the county and the town consider to be Pembroke's municipal boundaries. Pridgen testified at Friday's hearing that the county and Pembroke have solved the discrepancy. A new and old map were available for review by about 25 people who attended the hearing at the Robeson County Board of Elections office on North Walnut Street in Lumberton.

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During his opening comments, Dial charged that the attorneys for Cummings, Don Wright, Grady Hunt and Gary Locklear, twisted and arranged facts surrounding the election to make things appear the "way they want."

"I tried to conduct the hearings and elections fairly and honestly," Dial said. "All I ask the board to do is look at these issues with the aspects of honesty and fairness."

The March do-over election was ordered by the state Board of Elections in January after members determined that there was enough evidence of voter irregularities, possible fraud and administrative errors by the local Board of Elections to warrant a new election.

On April 25, the county Board of Elections voted unanimously to dismiss Dial's protests for lack of substantial evidence that could cast doubt on the results of the election. He appealed that decision to the state board, which sent the matter back to the county for corrective action.

Dial had favored a new election, saying vote-buying tainted the March 15 results.

Pembroke has been without a mayor since the death of Milton Hunt more than a year ago. Councilman Channing Jones has been conducting meetings as mayor pro tem.

Bob Shiles can be reached at 910-416-5165.



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