

# Record Searchlight

## LOCAL

# Shasta County's ballot counting controversy came to a surprising end Tuesday. What happened?

**Damon Arthur and David Benda** Redding Record Searchlight

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Tuesday's election in Shasta County may have appeared to be low key, with just a few minor races. But the battle over ballot counting that went on in the background gave the race enough significance to draw observers from around the state.

Despite the controversy over whether ballots would be counted by hand or by machine, Tuesday's election went along fairly smoothly, according to Cathy Darling Allen, the county's registrar of voters.

"I'm really pleased. We had a quiet day here in the office. I understand we did have some voters at polling places who were challenging and had questions that were more confrontational with some of our poll workers, but nothing they couldn't handle, which is great," Darling Allen said.

Voters turned out Tuesday to elect a new member to the Gateway Unified School District board of trustees and decide whether to create a new fire protection district in the historic community of Shasta west of Redding.

But the controversy over ballot counting and election integrity drew dozens of observers who showed up at the elections office in downtown Redding on Tuesday.

The Board of Supervisors last winter terminated the county's contract with Dominion Voting Systems so the county could hand count ballots in this election, making Shasta County the only county in the state set to tally votes by hand.

It was also a move Darling Allen opposed.

But in October, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation outlawing hand counting ballots, except in small elections. Despite the new law, Board of Supervisors Chairman

Patrick Jones threatened legal action to allow hand counting of ballots.

With the uncertainty over how the election might play out, voter advocacy groups sent a letter to the California Secretary of State voicing "grave" concerns about the integrity of Tuesday's election.

Representatives from three of those groups came to Redding to observe the election. They were California Common Cause, Disability Rights California and the League of Women Voters of California.

Representatives from the Secretary of State's Office also showed up at the elections office in Redding to observe, but there were no disruptions, Darling Allen said.

Media from Sacramento and Los Angeles arrived in Redding to cover the election.

Ryan Ronco, president of the California Association of Clerks and Elections Officials, said he came to Redding on Tuesday to observe the election process and to support Darling Allen and her staff.

"Definitely, the fact that this (election) has some implications that are a little different than the other elections, I just didn't want to make it seem like, as the president of the association, this was top of mind for me. It's definitely an important election, I wanted to be able to be here to show support for our elections officials around the state," Ronco said.

Dora Rose, deputy director for League of Women Voters of California, said the entire state was paying attention to Tuesday's election in Shasta County.

Rose said her group came to the county elections office in downtown Redding to observe and also to support Darling Allen.

"Cathy Darling Allen has a history of administering fair elections. She's has been unfairly maligned by certain board (of supervisors) members," Rose said. "We don't believe anything with Shasta County elections should have caused them to get rid of the Dominion machines, especially without a plan in place."