

Gallup completes election certification

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Three ‘under’ votes amid final tally

There were no real problems with the recent election for city council seats in District 1 or District 3, officials said. But there were instances whereby nothing was marked on a few ballots and that was something that came out of last week’s canvassing session, officials said.

The final vote tally was skewed a little due to the fact that there were three “under” votes, Gallup City Clerk Al Abeita said. That means that three voters inserted a ballot into a machine, but there was nothing essentially marked on the ballot.

The under votes occurred at the McKinley County Courthouse and related to District 1. The other under vote took place at Gallup City Hall and during the early voting period, Abeita said.

“There were three ballots that didn’t have anything marked,” Abeita said. “That was confirmed during the canvassing process.”

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There are 6,459 eligible voters in Gallup, but just 799 votes cast in the March 14 council election, making the overall voter turnout figure at 12.37 percent, Abeita noted.

Incumbents Linda Garcia and Yogash Kumar reclaimed their council seats. Each ran on political platforms that included beautification, infrastructure improvement, increasing tourism and bettering downtown, respectively.

Kumar, an area hotelier with holdings as far away as Albuquerque, won with 301 votes to 224 for challenger Esco Chavez. Local restaurateur Angela Chavez garnered 175 votes in the District 3 race.

Esco Chavez

Esco Chavez is a former city parks and recreation department director and New Mexico State University graduate who grabbed voter interest with bold statements and news conferences where he took jabs at the city's neglect of the Gallup Soccer Complex and the Ford Canyon Senior Center. Both locales are not in use. The utilities at the senior center remain on and at an eye-popping \$500 per month, a city official has said.

"You know life is like a football game," Chavez mused after the election. "Sometimes you win, sometimes you don't. I will probably run again in the future."

Garcia ran unopposed and won with 96 votes. Garcia joked after the election that "it was a tough race." Garcia's council district includes Gallup's Hispanic-dominated north side and that constituency came out in droves to show their appreciation. Garcia is Hispanic and from Gallup and got 37 votes from the North Side Fire Station No. 2 and McKinley County Courthouse voting precincts.

Garcia and fellow councilor Fran Palochak lead the entire city council in the number of neighborhood association meetings that take place in their districts about every other week.

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Gallup city councilors serve four-year staggered terms and earn an annual salary of \$15,000. Kumar has donated nearly all of his annual salary to worthy causes since being elected in 2013.

Those who took part in the canvassing at Gallup City Hall were Abeita, Gallup Deputy City Clerk Alicia Palacios, Municipal Judge Grant Foutz and Gallup City Attorney George Kozeliski.

Garcia and Kumar were sworn in at the March 16 city council meeting amid a food reception and before Foutz.

Abeita said the city uses an optical scan tabulator type machine that belongs to the McKinley County Bureau of Elections Department. The March 14 municipal election was the second time Gallup used the county machines, Abeita said. The sole problem the city had with the machines was a ballot getting hung up during the early voting period, Abeita said. The problem was solved by using the return key on the tabulator, Abeita said.

***By Bernie Dotson
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