

NEWS RELEASE

(For Immediate Release – April 4, 2022)

GRAVE DISCREPANCY IDENTIED IN AFFIRMATION ENVELOPE COUNT

On Wednesday March 30, 2022, the Missoula County Republicans circulated an email to their membership reporting that a count of “Affirmation Envelopes from the 2020 election that were contained in 33 numbered boxes.” This represents a discrepancy of two additional numbered boxes of affirmation envelopes as compared to a count made by the Missoula County Election Integrity Project (the Integrity Project) on January 4, 2021.

On January 4, 2021, the Election Office produced 31 sealed boxes of affirmation envelopes to the Integrity Project pursuant to a request made under Montana “right to know” law. The County had an obligation to and claimed that it did produce all the boxes of affirmation envelopes it had in its custody per Montana election regulations. The Integrity Project’s January 4, 2021, count revealed that the County Election Office had tallied 4,592 more votes than the number of envelopes it received in the all mail-in election. The troubling result raised concerns over the integrity of the 2022 vote count. In an affidavit, Lyn Hellegaard, who served as the supervisor of the Integrity Project team of citizen volunteers who counted the signature envelopes on January 4, 2021, states that election officials produced 31 boxes of envelopes for the January 4, 2021 count.

In a count commissioned by the Missoula County Republicans and conducted on March 28-29, 2022, by County Election Office staff. The Election Office produced a total of 33 numbered boxes of affirmation envelopes two more than the County produced on January 4, 2021. The March 2022 count resulted in 71 fewer envelopes than votes tallied, while the January 2021 count resulted in 4,592 fewer envelopes than votes tallied,

The two additional boxes of envelopes produced on March 28 explain the difference of 4,521 between the two counts. The Integrity Project can only speculate about the origins of the County’s additional and unexplained “two extra boxes” of affirmation envelopes.

The Election Office’s early destruction of the video logs from the 2020 General Election make this discrepancy even more egregious. After County Election Administrator Bradley Seaman made the Integrity Project aware of the video logs 42 days after election day, Integrity Project legal counsel asked to view the election day video. County IT staff informed Seaman in an email he forwarded to the Integrity Project, that the video had been deleted before it had been requested. The deletion of the video violated Missoula County regulations requiring all video records to be preserved for at least 60 days, as well as the Federal law requiring all election records to be maintained for 22 months.

If the video had not been destroyed, it could easily resolve the question of the number of affirmation envelope boxes that were filled on election day.

Integrity Project member Brad Tschida stated that the additional two boxes of affirmation envelopes materializing for the second count could mean only one of two things, neither of them reassuring. Mr. Tschida stated:

“It could mean that the Election Office is merely incompetent and lost track of the two boxes. If this is the case, a written chain of custody should exist in County records to establish when the lost boxes disappeared and when and where they were found. We call on the Election Office to release the chain of custody to the public.

“The other alternative is that in the 15 months since January 4, 2021, two extra boxes of counterfeit envelopes were generated deliberately by wrongdoers. The latter alternative could explain why in the recent count, the Election Office required citizen observers to sit at least six feet away—too far away to see the signatures or dates on the affirmation envelopes. This revelation calls the Missoula County Election Office into deeper question than before. State-level officials must investigate the Missoula County Election Office errors as the public continues to have deep seated concerns about the 2020 election.”