

ELECTION CENTER

Recount, council could break mayoral knot in Jasper

*By Dubois County Herald**Posted: Nov. 04, 2015*

JASPER, Ind. — Who will be Jasper's mayor for the next four years?

No one knows yet. The race ended in a tie Tuesday night.

Based on state statute, breaking that tie will be up to the seven-member Jasper Common Council.

After waiting all 12 hours Tuesday for voters to cast their ballots and then waiting out the approximate hour for the results to be tallied, the number of votes for Republican incumbent Terry Seitz and Democratic challenger Wayne Schuetter were exactly the same.

"I expected it to be close. We figured it would be close," Schuetter said outside of the Jasper Knights of Columbus hall, where the Jasper Democrats gathered Tuesday night. "But this close?"

Schuetter and Seitz each received 1,856 votes. Joshua Budd, the Independent challenger, receive 190 votes.

"I have a feeling there is a life lesson in this," Seitz said from Tuesday night's Republican gathering at the VFW Post in Jasper. "I'm happy with the outcomes for Nancy (Eckerle) and Dean (Vonderheide). As for me, I can't do anything about what I can't do anything about."

As the votes came in during the evening, the race stayed relatively close, with the decision coming down to the final two precincts to report: Madison-Jasper North and Madison-Jasper South (both are on the west side of the city near Division Road and County Road 400W (Madison-Jasper South) and the Brescher subdivision (Madison-

Jasper North). Once votes from those precincts were tallied and it was announced that the race was a tie, the shock and surprise echoed throughout both political gatherings.

"It is interesting to be part of history," Schuetter said. "It really is."

The history he is referring to is the fact that there is a tie. No one Tuesday evening — not even the three members of the Dubois County Election Board — could recall a time where there was an actual tie in a local election. Sure, there were races that were decided by one or two votes, said Bridgette Jarboe, Republican member Roger Messmer and Democratic member Mike Fritch. But not a tie.

"The election board certifies it to the city council, and they are the deciding factor," said Jarboe, Dubois County's clerk. "They have until Dec. 31 of this year to do so, and it is the current sitting council that would make that decision, barring a recount or a contest."

According to state statute, in the event of a tie, the fiscal governing body tied to the race breaks the tie. In this case, that is the seven-member Jasper Common Council. The current Jasper council is comprised of four Democrats (Tom Schmidt, Greg Schnarr, Earl Schmitt and Randy Buchta) and three Republicans (Dave Prechtel, Kevin Manley and Ray Howard). Schmidt, Prechtel and Howard did not run for re-election and Buchta lost his seat in today's election. That means four members of the current council could decide Jasper's next mayor then not be on the council when that mayor takes office.

The candidates or party chairs can file a lawsuit requesting a recount. The candidates have until Nov. 17 to file a suit and party chairs have until Nov. 20. If a recount is done and the totals come out to be different, those new totals become the official result for the race.

Schuetter isn't sure if he will file for recount.

"At this time, I don't think so," Schuetter said Tuesday night. "But I will make a decision in the morning."

Schuetter said he will check with the clerk's office once the certification is complete.

"If the election board felt all the ballots were fine and there were no abnormalities, I can't see requesting a recount," he said. "At this point, I feel pretty good about where we are."

Seitz said Tuesday night he had not heard officially the details of the process for breaking the tie. But planned to speak with Dubois County Republican Party Chairman Don Hayes on the matter.

"The state Republican Party has reached out as well," he said. "It's gone to a level that seems to be beyond just my campaign."

If neither side files for a recount, or if that recount determines that there is still a tie, the common council will make the final decision on the race.

All because there wasn't one more vote tallied in either direction.

"We always say that people should get out and vote," Schuetter said. "This is another good indicator as to why everybody needs to get out and vote."

Seitz said he spoke with an 8-year-old boy while at the Republicans' gathering at the VFW. "I said, 'Young man you're going to hear this phrase a whole lot throughout your life, that every vote counts. And you're going to know that's really true.'"

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