

(Draft questions for possible Washington News Council hearing:)

Secretary of State Sam Reed vs. KIRO-TV

Overview: Washington State's Secretary of State Sam Reed formally complains that two investigative reports last fall on KIRO-TV -- reports which still remain on the station's website -- contained significant factual errors, were incomplete, lacked balance, were sensationalized, inflammatory and unfair. The complainant says the station ignored several specific requests for corrections and clarifications.

The complainant also states that, because of numerous, often strident e-mail and telephone responses to his office about the stories, significant damage was done to the credibility of the office of Secretary of State.

The Washington News Council Executive Committee and Complaints Committee find that the complaint is timely and raises substantive journalistic issues so as to warrant a hearing if the parties do not reconcile their differences.

The stories involved are:

"24,000 Felons Getting Ballots, Despite Eligibility Questions" (aired and posted Oct. 15, 2008), and
"100 Dead Voters on the Voter Rolls, with 15 Casting Ghost Ballots" (aired and posted Nov. 3, 2008 – the eve of the 2008 general election)

Possible questions for a hearing board to consider, re: "24,000 Felons...":

- 1) Was KIRO-TV's coverage of the process of reinstating the voting rights of former felons *inaccurate* and *incomplete* by misstating clearly defined rules and procedures?
- 2) Did KIRO-TV's coverage of the process of reinstating former felons' voting rights fail to include *balancing* information and responses from state election officials?
- 3) Did KIRO-TV's study findings *misrepresent* voting data by *incorrectly* extrapolating eligible voter totals and estimates?
- 4) Did KIRO-TV *inaccurately* portray Tracy Joy Wilkerson as a convicted felon when, as election officials maintain, she was not a felon and her voting rights never were suspended?
- 5) Did KIRO-TV's coverage of the voting eligibility process *damage* credibility of the Secretary of State's office in its ability to administer election eligibility procedures?

Possible questions for a hearing board to consider, re: "100 Dead Voters..."

- 1) Was KIRO-TV's report that some deceased voters who remained on the ballot still voted *incorrect*, *incomplete* and *misleading*? The report identified only one deceased voter – Edward Hanel – who allegedly voted. Claimant maintains that report confused the deceased voter with his son, deployed in military service and very much alive, who actually cast the ballot in question.
- 2) Was KIRO-TV's coverage *unfair* and *unbalanced* by not including rebutting comments from the Secretary of State's Office and from Pierce County election officials (the Hanel family lives in Pierce County)?
- 3) Did KIRO's election eve coverage of the voting eligibility processes for removing deceased members of the electorate from voting rolls *damage* the credibility of state and county election officials?