

Comment

Time for reconciliation

EAST PALO ALTO was declared a city Wednesday for the second time in three months. The first time was June 7, the day residents voted to incorporate. The vote was a close one — incorporation was approved by a mere 15 votes — but, as the old saying goes, you only need one to win.

The second time came Wednesday afternoon in a Redwood City courtroom. John Cruikshank, a visiting Superior Court judge from San Joaquin County, declared that the election had been run properly and that its results should stand.

Cruikshank did not exonerate anyone with his decision. In fact, he said several times during the trial that he thinks people on both sides of the incorporation issue have "dirty hands."

Cruikshank ruled that eight votes were cast by people who did not live at their registered addresses. Three of the invalid votes were cast by people who fought against incorporation. The other five were cast by voters whose residency was challenged by the Citizens Coalition Against Incorporation Now, the group that filed the court challenge.

Cruikshank scheduled another hearing for Sept. 23 to find out how those eight people voted so he can adjust the votes accordingly. The outcome will not alter the election results, though.

The judge got particularly upset during the trial when several people testified that they never would have voted if they had known they would be required to appear in court. A couple of witnesses said they may never vote again.

Cruikshank also was concerned that elderly voters, first-time voters and unsophisticated voters in the community

were being "harassed and used" by incorporation opponents.

The incorporation campaign was bitterly fought and it has been bitterly contested. As Tom Adams, the lawyer representing the city of East Palo Alto, pointed out during the trial, campaigning is a "rough and tumble business." We sincerely hope that innocent voters who cast their ballots in good faith were not hurt so badly by the "rough and tumble business" that they will never vote again.

Obviously, not everyone is happy with Cruikshank's decision. CCAIN says it plans to appeal. CCAIN attorney Paul N. McCloskey said Cruikshank's decision has "monumental significance" because it will allow campaign workers and political candidates to go into voters' homes and help them prepare their absentee ballots.

"That sets a historic precedent and opens the absentee ballot process to tremendous opportunities of fraud and coercion," McCloskey said.

Cruikshank noted the huge split in the community over the incorporation issue and he said he didn't want the trial to increase those bad feelings. We agree with the judge wholeheartedly.

We know the convictions held by the incorporation opponents are sincere and heartfelt. But we hope the "rough and tumble business" is over in East Palo Alto. We think it is time to put an end to the bitterness and mistrust that has divided the community.

We are hoping that both sides of the incorporation issue will make real and sincere efforts at reconciliation. It is time for hand washing and hand shaking in East Palo Alto.