



Washington governor's race: Another recount likely

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SEATTLE - The election was already aching close, but the recount in the race for governor of Washington state was almost absurdly close.

Republican Dino Rossi, who was declared the winner last week, with a 261-vote margin of victory, won the recount by a mere 42 votes, out of almost 3 million cast.

But the bizarre contest here was anything but settled on Wednesday, as Democrats appeared certain to request a costly, tedious new hand recount, possibly featuring the manual inspection of chads.

Democrats were likely to request a manual count in at least some, or even all, of the state's 39 counties, insisting that the vote - 48.8717 percent to 48.8702 percent - was far too close for their candidate, Washington's attorney general, Christine Gregoire, 57, to concede.

It was by far the closest contest in Washington history and ranks as one of the narrowest margins in a political race in U.S. history.

"I've been in the election business for 33 years, and I'm astonished," Washington Secretary of State Sam Reed said Wednesday afternoon at a televised news conference in Olympia, the state capital. "When they gave me these results, I must admit I was stunned. We are talking about such a small percentage of difference that it is almost unbelievable."

Bitter feuding between the two parties, which have already sparred in court over the vote count in heavily Democratic King County, began only seconds after the final results of the three-day recount came in Wednesday afternoon.

Democrats said the closeness of the count was a sure sign that the voting machines were fallible and Republicans accused the Democrats of plotting to cherry pick and only request a hand recount in Democrat-leaning counties.

"The most important thing is that people have confidence that their governor was elected and was credibly elected," said Kirstin Brost, a spokeswoman for the Washington State Democrats. "People have to have confidence in the process. If we were talking about a difference of 5,000 votes, it would be a very different story. But we are talking about a difference that is less than one one-hundredth of 1 percent."

Rossi, 45, a real estate agent and former state senator, was on vacation, but several members of his transition team held a televised news conference Wednesday afternoon outside his campaign headquarters in Bellevue, east of Seattle.

"The votes have been counted twice," said Kathy Lambert, a King County councilwoman. "We know very clearly who won."

J. Vander Stoep, Rossi's transition team chief of staff, said, "A lot of lawyers are either buying plane tickets or they are here already, on both sides, and will they be unleashed? That's Christine Gregoire's choice, whether to unleash that and turn this into Florida the Second, or whether to say two counts is enough."

If Democrats request another recount, they must shoulder the cost, estimated at \$700,000 if all 39 Washington counties were included in the hand recount, costing 25 cents a ballot.