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Editorial: Lawyers need to let vote count proceed

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In recent days, Democrat Kamala Harris has gained a slim lead over Republican Steve Cooley in the still way-too-close-to-call California attorney general's race.

As the vote count proceeds, the two candidates have stationed supporters at the Los Angeles voter registrar's office to watch the processing of provisional ballots. No problem with that.

It's an important race. The count needs to be open and transparent. Interested parties ought to pay attention.

Here's the problem. Since his small lead evaporated over the weekend, Cooley's campaign has grown worrisomely aggressive in its effort to question provisional votes in Los Angeles County.

Although Cooley is the Los Angeles County district attorney, Los Angeles is a Democratic stronghold, and San Francisco District Attorney Harris consistently has outpolled him in his backyard.

Cooley's lawyers have sent letters accusing Los Angeles County elections officials of having improper contact with Harris campaign volunteers, of not spending enough time checking signatures on provisional ballots and of not following proper procedures when determining whether a voter is legally registered.

The Los Angeles registrar has refuted every charge convincingly.

As Cooley's campaign lawyers persist, the Harris camp's charge that Cooley is attempting to disqualify "as many provisional ballots as possible" begins to ring true.

The backdrop is this: Historically, provisional ballots have favored Democrats. Cooley, the Republican, likely gains an advantage every time one of them is thrown out.

This page endorsed Cooley. Although both candidates are well-qualified, we still believe Cooley would make a better attorney general than Harris. Nonetheless, the candidate with the most valid votes should win. Each candidate has a right to monitor the counting. But they should not interfere. The attorneys need to let county voting officials do their job fairly.

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