

By SABRINA GARRETT

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Election officials confirmed Thursday that provisional ballots could sway the results of the Lebanon Special School District Board of Education race that incumbent Steve Jones unofficially won on Tuesday night by only nine votes.

On Election Day, Jones posted 4,585 votes, or 49.86 percent to fellow candidate Johnie Payton's 4,576 votes, or 49.77 percent. Administrator of Elections Phillip Warren said that there are 165 green provisional ballots and 21 orange provisional ballots – which could possibly change the outcome of the election.

“There are two kinds of provisional ballots,” Warren explained. “The orange ballot means that you are a registered voter, you just forget your photo ID. Some people will get all the way through the line on Election Day, but maybe left their ID in their car. This way they can vote, then, show their ID [at a later time].”

The green provisional ballots are for those who the Election Commission and volunteers could not find in the system.

“In a lot of cases, it turns out that those don't count,” he said. “Having provisional ballots gives us time after the excitement of Election Day to determine which voters are supposed to be there.”

Because of the high number of provisional ballots, the state of Tennessee issued an extension to count provisional ballots to election commissions statewide. Warren said they have until next Friday to count ballots.

The first match-up between Jones and Payton took place during the Aug. 2 election – with Payton, a retired school teacher, arising victorious by a one-vote margin. In that election Payton

received 1,468 votes and Jones received 1,467.

Jones appealed before Chancellor C.K. Smith in late August to challenge the results, saying that some voters did not have the opportunity to vote in the school board race because the race was not shown on their respective ballots.

“It was just a mix up. They were redistricting, so it was probably just some computer glitch – a human error,” Jones said.

As a result of Jones’s challenge, Smith ruled that the election should be voided and both should run again on the ballot in November.

Jones has held the non-paying position on the Board of Education for the past 24 years.

He acknowledged that “the provisional ballots could change things. You never know what might happen, but it is in God’s hands. Whatever He decides to do, I’m good with,” he said. “I have no hard feelings toward anybody.”

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