

# Closest election race in almost 20 years

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councillor George Montour and in District Six; veteran Irvin Harris was defeated.

Wellington Staats said it was the closest race he has ever won. "It's never been this close before. Melba (Thomas) had me worried for a while there. It was kinda scary," he said after being pronounced the winner at almost midnight Saturday.

Thomas, who nervously watched the night long neck-in-neck race that at one point saw her leading the polls, said she will be back to challenge Staats again in three years.

"I'm not giving up. I will be the community's watchdog over the next three years. I feel very excited at the close race considering a woman nearly defeated Wellington (Staats). I think the people want change and are ready for change. They want open meetings. They want to know what's going on. I will be watching the new council. I will be back again."

Staats said he didn't see the close victory as any kind of signal being sent over his style of leadership.

"I don't know what more the people want. Open meetings. I'm kinda stuck on that I don't know what they mean. We have most of our meetings open. I don't know how more open we can get. You can't have all your meetings open. You need space to tell the council what's happening. Some things can only be privy to council. You'd have to be pretty politically



*The long election night was taking its toll on candidates for elected chief Melba Thomas and Wellington Staats. The tight race kept them both on the edge of their seats. (Photos by Lynda Powless)*

naive to think you can get away without having any closed meetings."

Staat said he could not comment on whether this newly elected council will sit for one or three years. "Who knows," he quipped.

Reg Hill who ran a strong third in the polls with 264 votes said his second try for the band council chief seat is his last. Hill said in three years, he will be older, "we'll all be older. I won't be running again. We campaigned well. It was a very, very close race. Only 1,183 people voted for chief. We had a good strong campaign putting the people first. I think we did well."

In a tension packed evening Thomas received 365 votes that saw her leading the polls early in the evening over Wellington

Staats for Band Council Chief here.

It was a neck and neck night for the two starting with the advance polls that saw Wellington Staats receive 29 votes and Melba Thomas 24. Third in the ranking was Reg Hill who took 264 votes overall, with 12 in the advance polls.

As the night wore on Staats was at 100 votes compared to Thomas 91 as she closed in, the crowd at the hall began to ooh and ahh but within the hour Thomas had taken the lead with 273 vote compared to Staats 255 and the hall grew quiet.

The neck and neck race went on with Thomas at 292, and Staats at 288 with each climbing by one. The gap narrowed as Staats picked

up and the vote went from Thomas as 311 to Staats at 313.

In the last half hour Staats picked up 333 to Thomas 324 and Staats began to climb finally taking a 37 vote lead.

Coming in fourth in the race was Roger Jonathan, a local businessman and single parent who took 129 votes. Lillian Montour, a former councillor received 13 votes

and a surprise in the race, William D. Hill, a hobby farmer and truck driver drew 10 votes getting his first vote counted well after an hour into the ballot count and spurring a round of applause from the crowd that had gathered at the hall.

There were a total of 1,193 votes cast for chief with 10 rejected ballots.