

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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Accountability Board Members' Voter Data Do Not Match Department of Transportation Records

Recent Board Decision to Forego Requiring a Match Appears Sound

MADISON, WI – In a test comparison of Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS) data with state Department of Transportation (DOT) data, four of six members of the Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) failed the initial data cross-check, Elections Division staff said Thursday.

Three Board members' DOT data did not match exactly with their voter registration information due to differences in the first and last name or middle initial, and one member's birth date did not match, according to Division Administrator Nat Robinson.

The test was conducted after the Board last week decided against requiring retroactive checks of previously entered voter information back to January 2006. All new voter registration information is now matched against DOT records.

When voter information does not match DOT records, the municipal clerk reviews the original registration documents to check for data entry errors. If the discrepancy is not resolved, the clerk sends a letter to the voter to clarify the difference.

The Board also decided not to adopt a rule flagging voters on the poll list if the discrepancy had not been resolved before an election. The proposed rule would have required voters whose information did not match DOT records to provide identifying information before voting or to vote on a provisional ballot, which requires voters to provide follow-up information in order to have their votes counted.

The "HAVA Check" function in the SVRS – required by federal law – automatically cross-checks newly entered voter data with DOT information such as driver's license numbers, names and dates of birth. Neither state nor federal law specifies how to treat voter records that do not match DOT records. The match function compares the name, date of birth and driver's license number in both data bases.

"This is significant because two-thirds of the G.A.B., made up of long-time voters and well-respected former judges, could have been forced to vote on provisional ballots," Robinson said. "It's clear the data quality issue must be addressed before this cross-checking function can be used to ensure reliable voter data."

After Elections Division staff corrected the Board member's voter information to match state DOT records, all of them passed the cross-checking procedure. For example, Thomas Cane, G.A.B. chairman, goes by his middle name and has an initial "R" in front of his name on his Wisconsin driver's license. That first initial caused him to fail the automatic data cross-check.

While the cross-checking process is supposed to improve voter data quality, Board members were concerned that two State systems may present too many dissimilarities to be immediately useful to local election officials. Names often vary depending upon how drivers or voters fill out applications, and those variations cause a data mismatch.

Based on initial statistics, and the test comparison of G.A.B. members' information, data of more than 20 percent of new voters have not matched DOT records on first comparison, mostly likely due to variation in use of names, typographical errors and other incompatibilities between the two agencies' databases.

"We will continue to ask local election officials to request voter information in the form it is printed on other major documents, such as a driver's license," Robinson said. "The 'HAVA Check' function will help them more when the data is more reliable."

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The Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) is responsible for administration and enforcement of campaign finance, elections, ethics and lobbying laws in Wisconsin. The G.A.B. is made up of six non-partisan, former judges and is supported by an agency of non-partisan staff members. Additional information about the mission of the G.A.B. may be obtained by telephone at **1-608-266-8005**, by electronic mail at **gab@wi.gov**, or through the Internet at **<http://gab.wi.gov>**.