

Early Voting Listening Session – Clerks/Public Meeting
Bayfield County Courthouse Annex
August 13, 2009
Washburn, WI

Notes & Feedback

Attendance: 7

- Notes and Feedback on Early Voting in General
 1. This audience felt that any problems were ones that are only encountered once every four years, for the presidential election. One audience member felt that it was registration that took so long, and not voting itself.
 2. It was reported that, in this region of the state, that absentee in-person voting is unusual. There are far more mail-in absentee voters in this region of the state.
 3. One audience member felt that the increase in absentee voters is a good thing. He felt that this showed that voters know the election system, voters are able to vote early if they choose, and that voters should be educated about the current system that seems to work well instead of pushing for a new system.
 4. Some in the audience questioned the need for early voting at all, suggesting that the issues are mainly found in large cities, on the last two to three days of the in-person absentee period. Therefore, the suggested course of action would be to focus on voter education and trying to get voters to vote in-person absentee spread out over more days instead of coming all at the same time.
- Notes and Feedback on Costs of Early Voting
 1. The attendees questioned whether the public at large understood the costs of running an election. One attendee questioned whether people even really cared about the high cost of election administration.

- Notes and Feedback on SVRS

1. SVRS users at this meeting reported issues with SVRS that made them question whether a SVRS-based e-poll list would be a workable solution. Issues cited included problems with response times when many users were attempting to use SVRS at the same time, and subsequent time-out issues this would cause.
2. SVRS users also felt that the absentee function in SVRS was lacking in general, and that the absentee module needs to be improved to encourage adoption of its use in more municipalities.
3. This audience asked questions about how voter numbers would be assigned to early voters, particularly in an e-poll system. Adam suggested a watermarked “EV” and number next to their names to allow poll workers to easily see that someone has early voted.

- Notes and Feedback on Option A, Regional Early Voting Districts

1. One concern about Option A was that having a county-based early vote center could be less convenient for voters, particularly in this region of the state, than the current system. The audience wondered whether voters would be less happy having to drive long distances to a single early vote center at the county seat instead of being able to make an appointment with their clerk.
2. The other concern expressed by this audience was the amount of ballot styles that would need to be on hand in the county clerks’ office to cover the entire county, and the financial/logistical burden that would place on the county clerk. The assumption with this concern would be that the county clerk would have to rely on optical scan machines, since the cost of DREs would be prohibitive.

- Notes and Feedback on Option B, Municipalities Opt Into Early Voting

1. There was some amount of discussion among the audience as to the importance of uniformity, particularly in response to Option B, as it would not create a uniform system across Wisconsin. Some felt that

a lack of uniformity was not an issue, since it would better reflect the very different needs of different municipalities. Others felt that the increase in voter confusion would be a problem, as well as voters being uncomfortable with having different systems across the state.

2. The audience had a generally positive reaction to the idea of making the opt-in/out system of early voting tied to population size.
 3. One municipal clerk stated that her poll workers are older, and though they are reliable, they would not be available for the entire early voting period. Thus, finding enough poll workers would be a burden.
- Notes and Feedback on Option C, Streamline Current Absentee Process
1. It was felt that pushing back the end of the in-person absentee period from the Monday before the election to the Friday before the election or even earlier would allow the clerks to have some amount of recovery time prior to Election Day.
 2. One audience member felt that the time contraction would affect most municipalities in the region, as they have so few in-person absentee voters – some clerks don't even have a single in-person absentee voter.
 3. It was suggested that not having to fill out the entire witnessed envelope would make things smoother, and instead of having the full application we should make the in-person process more like voting at a polling place.
 4. One person supported the idea of the sign-in sheet having both a printed name and a signature to prevent clerks from having to interpret illegible handwriting.
 5. A clerk in this audience said that they anticipated the demand in November 2008 and staffed appropriately, but that she noticed that it was only on the final few days of in-person absentee voting that the number of in-person voters became significant.

6. The clerk for Bayfield County stated that the clerks of Bayfield County are not in favor of anything beyond slight tweaking of in-person absentee voting.