

Early Voting Listening Session – Clerk’s Session
Fitchburg Community Center
July 7, 2009
Fitchburg, WI

Notes & Feedback

- **Comments and Feedback on Early Voting in General**

1. The clerks stated that voters feel secure placing their ballot in an envelope. There was the question of whether voters would feel their votes were less secure in a ballot box, which would degrade voter experience.
2. Bob Ohlsen, clerk of Dane County, brought up potential issues of having to distribute early voting ballots without envelopes in a municipality with many different wards, such as Madison which has 145 different wards. If voted ballots are put into a container without an envelope, someone would have to go through every ballot and decide what ballots belonged in different wards. This might not be an issue with small municipalities, but would be with large cities.
3. The reasons for the long lines for in-person absentee voting during the 2008 Presidential election were discussed. Some suggested that the election was unusual in terms of voter turnout and that the issues present in November 2008 are not typical of most elections. Another reason for long lines in November 2008 was believed to be registration. One commenter suggested that the large numbers of newly registered voters, and voters needing to register, may have caused the delays. Mike Doyle, clerk of Green County, said that in Green County it was the registration lines that were long, and not the actual voting lines. Finally, it was suggested that political parties and the media heavily promoted “early voting” and that as a result there were long lines for in-person absentee voting and short lines on Election Day.
4. The differences between the needs and resources of large and small municipalities were a major point of conversation. Some clerks felt

that the municipalities facing issues with the current in-person absentee system disproportionately represent large cities and that for smaller Wisconsin municipalities there may not be a problem with the current in-person absentee system.

5. Methods of counting ballots were also discussed. An experiment in the Village of McFarland showed that they didn't save any time with one polling location using central count; in fact, it was reported they spent more time as a result. It was suggested that maybe if you had two or four locations it might make sense, though there was a deal of skepticism about this conclusion. This tied into early voting to suggest that counting the early voting ballots in a central count might not be more efficient than current practice.
6. It was asked, in terms of reconciling votes, why a machine couldn't keep count and thus remove the need to hand count votes. It was agreed that this was a viable solution for a small municipality with few ballot styles, but the large number of ballot styles in a larger municipality would result in a machine count being impractical.
7. The clerks noted that the time to reprogram voting machines is tight, especially between primary and general elections. This makes it difficult to use the same machines for both early voting and Election Day. The cost of programming was also noted as a burden for clerks.
8. On the subject of e-poll lists, there were questions on whether it would be possible to get the list of early voters into the poll book, especially without SVRS or Internet access, which is the case in various parts of the state. The costs of an e-poll list were also brought up as a negative of adopting an e-poll list.
9. One clerk said that there are two big elections every four years, the Gubernatorial and Presidential Elections. With this being the case, it was suggested that early voting only be offered during these high-interest elections, when it is actually needed.

- **Comments and Feedback on Early Voting Impacts on Part-Time Clerks**

1. It was felt that the current G.A.B. proposals did not consider how part-time clerks operate. It was pointed out that many part-time clerks do not have an office location, doing business instead from their home, and that many lack an Internet connection or even a computer. Since many part-time clerks also have another job, it was felt that mandating an early voting location to be open for 13 hours a day was not feasible.

- **Comments and Feedback on Same Day Registration**

1. Along with earlier statements that registration caused delays, it was estimated that the time to vote would be cut in half if there weren't Same Day Registration. Mike Doyle, clerk of Green County, and other clerks suggested that Same Day Registration should be abolished. However, Bob Ohlsen pointed out that there are ramifications in terms of a major increase in provisional ballots if Same Day Registration were no longer available.

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

1. It was felt that adopting Option B would cause issues regarding unequal access for voters. This inequality between municipalities was predicted to cause voters in opt-out communities to press their municipality to opt-in, causing a kind of "domino effect" that eliminates Option B's flexibility, which is touted as a major benefit of Option B.

- **Comments and Feedback on Option C, Streamlining In-Person Absentee Voting**

1. In terms of streamlining, Bob Ohlsen, clerk of Dane County, said that we need the envelope for the paper trail. His suggested streamlining

would eliminate the witness requirement for in-person absentee voting and instead only require the clerk's initials/signature on the absentevelope.

2. It was felt that the absentee application for in-person absentee voting is overly complex, particularly since much of the information is contained on the envelope.