

Early Voting Listening Session - Public Session  
Fitchburg Community Center  
July 7, 2009  
Fitchburg, WI

Notes & Feedback

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

1. It was pointed out that under the current system on in-person absentee voting, if a person dies before an election, their ballot can be caught before it is counted. Early voting would mean that electors who die after early voting but before the election have already cast their ballots, which will be counted in that election. The concern expressed was that, in this situation, there would be people “voting from the cemetery.”
2. A scenario was raised where an early voter would come to the early voting polling place and claim to be another voter, thus fraudulently casting a voter while also denying the other voter the ability to cast their ballot. Edward Edney of the G.A.B. staff said that we did not have a proposed protection against this scenario. It was pointed out by another member of the audience that under the current system, it is possible for this to occur today and may be a larger issue with election administration in Wisconsin.
3. In order to prevent voter fraud, it was suggested that early voting require an elector to present a government-issued ID in order to take advantage of early voting.
4. Online registration was brought up as a way of alleviating some of the issues with the current process and registration, and thus also alleviating some of the current issues that cause lines.
5. We were encouraged by audience respondents to make sure that access for the disabled and for seniors was taken into account in terms of implementing any future early voting plans.

- **Comments & Feedback on Early Voting Costs**

1. One audience member felt that early voting might make sense in a large election, such as a presidential or gubernatorial election, but that for other, smaller elections, the costs would be a “waste of money”.
2. There was some deal of discussion about voter education. It was said by some audience members that a lack of voter education may be a prime reason that in-person absentee voting lines were so extensive in November 2008. However, one audience member pointed out that voter education and educational materials cost money to produce.

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

1. Some of the meeting attendees felt that same day registration was a source of problems in the current voting process. One audience member felt that same day registration should be abolished. She felt that the state should “stop treating voters like children,” and that electors need to take responsibility in terms of voting.
2. Conversely, there were other attendees who felt that same day registration should be retained. One audience member said that it would not make sense to establish early voting but then restrict registration. Another member of the audience asked how we would compensate for those voters who become engaged in election during the late registration period if Same Day Registration was abolished.
3. One audience member wanted to encourage exploration of early voting, despite potential costs and increased workloads, because he felt that it was worthwhile in light of expected population growth and increased use of early voting methods.

- **Comments & Feedback on Option A, Regional Early Voting Districts**

1. An audience member felt that Option A would be helpful to smaller towns in northern Wisconsin. The advantages this person saw with Option A for these municipalities was that it would help small municipalities gain access to the Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS) during the early voting period, and that it would allow the sharing of costs across municipalities and/or counties and thus reduce the financial burdens of early voting.
2. It was asked, when the presentation mentions voting machines in Options A and B, what machines are being referred to. Edward Edney of the G.A.B. staff stated that the machines referred to in the presentation are Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) voting machines. A follow-up question was asked about how these machines would be secured. Mr. Edney replied that the municipal or county clerk would be responsible for securing the machine.
3. A member of Disability Rights Wisconsin said that a problem with Option A, and to an extent with Option B, would be that voting proximity would unduly influence someone's ability to vote. A disabled voter or senior citizen with difficulties getting out of the house or getting accessible transportation could face great burdens to vote early if the early voting locations in their regional district are a great distance away.
4. One audience member noted that if Option A was adopted, an elector unable to arrange transportation to a distant regional early voting location could still use mail-in absentee voting to vote prior to the election.

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

1. One audience member felt that the lack of uniformity with Option B would cause too much confusion, and that this was the major flaw with Option B.
2. One audience member speculated that if Option B was adopted that it would quickly result in Option A being adopted. Related to this concern was the belief that municipalities that opted out would be

pressured into opting in by citizens who saw early voting in neighboring municipalities.

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

1. One audience member raised her concerns about removing the oath from the current absentee process, particularly in terms of prosecution for election misconduct.
2. There was a suggestion by one audience member that a combination of Options A & C, which would result in regional districts that administered a streamlined early voting system, would be the most workable system.
3. An election inspector said that taking away the envelope would make it difficult to reconcile votes, especially in larger districts. She also felt there would be issues with an inspector certifying the work of other people, which would be the result of replacing absentee envelopes which are opened at the polls with a sign in sheet that is forwarded from absentee locations. She also had concerns about getting election results from multiple locations. A suggestion was offered that by reporting early votes in early voting districts this problem could be overcome.
4. It was also discussed whether we should require only early vote locations to have an internet connection if we were to use an electronic list. This would mean that e-poll lists would be used for all voting prior to Election Day, but that the current poll book method would still be used for Election Day and thus no internet connection would be required for those polling place locations.
5. It was opined that clerks would not be able to use their staff to do early voting. Municipal clerk staff has many duties outside of elections, and this puts an additional burden on the staff.

## **Comments and Feedback about Pilot Program**

1. There was concern raised about the methodology of the proposed pilot program, regarding whether a pilot in an urban location would reflect the different situations and challenges that are faced in rural municipalities. Edward Edney of the G.A.B. staff said that there is no final pilot program proposal, and that the G.A.B. hopes to run a pilot program in varied areas to take into account the differences in municipalities and regions around the state.