

Early Voting Listening Session – Clerks Session
West Allis City Hall
July 23, 2009
West Allis, WI

Notes & Feedback

Attendance: 59

- Comments and Feedback on Same Day Registration
 1. There was a strong discussion regarding closing Late/Same Day Registration. Closing registration was believed to increase election security.
 2. On the other hand, closing registration would also increase the number of provisional ballots filed, which may actually be more, not less, work than the current system.
 3. Registration errors, including poll worker error or SVRS error, happen too often and we should not prevent people from being able to vote if they are able to prove their residency.
 4. It was felt that having same day registration at an early voting location could be too much for poll workers to handle. One clerk stated that over 200 registrations came in for 600 early voters. Two workers staffing a location might not be able to handle that kind of volume.
 5. It was asked if same day registration would continue every day prior to an election, even if early voting closed on Wednesday or Thursday before the election. This was felt to be unnecessary as these electors would have to come back on Election Day to actually vote, when they could register at that time.
- Comments and Feedback on SVRS, Voting Machines & Poll Lists
 1. An E-poll list at the municipal clerk's list, in SVRS, cut off on Thursday or Wednesday, would allow the clerks to put early voters

directly in the system and be watermarked for a printed poll list. However, SVRS slowdown is an issue when everyone is hitting the system at the same time and would need to be resolved.

2. Having an E-poll list tied into SVRS was felt to be helpful to the poll workers and the clerks because it is believed to eliminate many extra steps in the early voting process.
3. The clerks strongly felt that it would help if the absentee voter watermark currently in SVRS was changed, because the current watermark only means that someone has received an absentee ballot, not that they have returned it. This information is not useful to clerks.
4. In reference to the best practices stating DREs are best practice for early voting, it was pointed out that DREs do take a long time to vote on and could therefore cause more, not less, lines. One clerk suggest a better practice would be to upgrade current optical scan voting machines from the Eagle's limited ballot styles to an Insight that can hold a significantly larger number of ballot styles.
5. It was noted that failed voting machine memory packs occur. It was then asked, if there is a problem harvesting data off the memory pack, what precaution would be taken to help this issue?
6. Milwaukee pointed out that the common thread of A, B or C is that some watermark in SVRS is needed, and that this is different from current procedure in Milwaukee, where poll workers do not look for any kind of absentee watermark. Poll books are printed 10 days prior to the election, and there are a lot of voters in this period. Having one more list for poll workers to check is too much to ask, with the supplemental list, felon list, and so on.
7. It was felt that the assumption that poll workers can enter data into SVRS isn't realistic, because the system is far too slow, especially when considering how many people would be accessing the system simultaneously.

8. Adam Harvell of the G.A.B. staff noted that there are too many places without Internet to suggest the use of an e-poll list statewide in every polling place on Election Day.
 9. One clerk wanted to know if there would be an option to start offering early voting later in the early voting period if there is a programming error with the voting machines. With the time crunch that would be caused by early voting, it was felt there a chance for more programming errors. As a solution, West Allis proposes to have a backup ready for when those errors occur, and that the backup be absentee in-person in the clerk's office.
- Comments and Feedback on Early Voting Costs
 1. It was asked who will pay for the early voting, since municipality are having financial distress as it currently stands.
 2. One clerk strongly felt that having a pilot program in April, and implementation of early voting in September, doesn't allow municipalities enough time to budget appropriately.
 - Comments and Feedback on Early Voting in General
 1. An open question was asked regarding cut-off of early voting on Friday - what do you do with the voters on Monday?
 2. One clerk felt that in-person absentee is only an issue in a presidential or gubernatorial election. She stated that the percentage of in-person absentee voters drops through the floor for all other elections, and that it could be a waste to mandate early voting for every election.
 3. Regarding the two poll workers that the G.A.B. suggests to be at an early vote location, does there need to be a split of political parties at early vote locations similar to Election Day?
 4. It was asked, if you staffed your early voting locations with temporary help, if those temporary workers would have to go through chief inspector training.

5. It was felt that the G.A.B. presentation should make clear that there is no need for someone with chief inspector training to be present at an early voting location if the municipal clerk or the deputy clerk is at the early vote location.
 6. One clerk wondered why the totals couldn't just be run from the early voting machines at the early vote location, basically making the early votes tallied by central count. Adam Harvell said there seems to be no reason why not, if a municipality would desire to do so.
 7. One suggestion was that municipalities be able to process all absentee ballots like early ballots, as soon as they are received in the clerks' offices. This would remove a burden from poll workers on Election Day, who may make mistakes because they have so many papers to deal with and because procedures change so often.
 8. One clerk felt that any procedure that is easier for the bigger municipalities can help smaller municipalities because the clerk has to handle so many things in a smaller community, and do so with smaller staffs.
 9. When asked for a show of hands, a few clerks favored leaving in-person absentee voting exactly as it is.
- Comments and Feedback on Option A, Regional Early Voting Districts
 1. Kathy Nickolaus, Clerk of Waukesha County, felt that Option A should still allow in-person absentee voting at the municipal level, and early voting would be available at the county seat (and other sites, if that were deemed necessary).
 2. There were concerns about the security and logical issues that would be brought up if early voting is run on the county level, particularly with finding and then transporting the correct ballots to the correct municipality.
 3. It was suggested that voters would see having to travel to their county seat to vote prior to the election, instead of the current

procedure that would allow them to vote in their municipality, would be seen as a downgrade over the current procedure.

4. It was asked how realistic would it be to shift to county-level control of elections. It was felt that a major downside of municipal control of election was that it requires SVRS training of 1800+ people, and the G.A.B. offers that training sporadically.
 5. One clerk said that she would personally favor Option A would not support it because, “my citizens would revolt” at the possible distance to the polling place at a county seat instead of the municipality.
 6. When asked for a show of hands, no clerks favored Option A.
- Comments and Feedback on Option B, Municipalities Opt Into Early Voting
 1. Brookfield expressed concerns regarding flexibility “because we’re different” – some municipalities are central count and others count by wards, there is a large variance in the amount of absentee votes received, population difference in municipalities and so forth. Therefore, she felt that giving municipalities the flexibility to choose is good.
 2. Some clerks felt that Option B, since it establishes different procedures to vote statewide, would cause a flood of lawsuits in light of the massive number of election-related lawsuits filed. Adam Harvell feels that Option B is does not violate the equal protection, but admits that there still could be voter confusion.
 3. When asked for a show of hands, about 1/3 of clerks favored Option B.
 - Comments and Feedback on Option C, Streamline In-Person Absentee
 1. One of the things noted about Option C was the addition of another list, which would slow down poll workers and therefore slow down the Election Day voting procedure. It was felt that this makes the

Election Day voters' experience less important than the early voting experience.

2. One clerk felt that if the state streamlines the absentee process and cuts off early voting little sooner, the state could avoid a lot of the current issues without making large changes.
3. One streamlining suggestion was to use the envelope as a kind of application. With this suggestion, Option C would keep the envelope and just include the application information on the envelope.
4. Brookfield felt that the requirement to fill out an absentee application when asking for an application in person is "ridiculous".
5. Neil Albrecht from Milwaukee stated that, in his opinion, the absentee envelope has no essential value. The absentee envelope slows down the process, and the envelopes are removed from the ballots, and thus he feels they could be eliminated.
6. One clerk suggested that a municipality with only 500 ballots cast, tinkering is fine, but with 9,000 ballots, she needed a bigger change to handle the issues her municipality experienced.
7. One clerk felt that Option C didn't make enough changes and that "just putting a Band-Aid on" isn't enough for the larger communities. On the other hand, she understands that smaller municipalities need options, too.
8. It was suggested that the state streamline absentee voting and just call it "early voting" to clear up confusion.
9. When asked for a show of hands, over half of the clerks favored Option C.

- Miscellaneous Comments and Feedback
 1. There were questions of the percentage of voter turnout in Oregon & Washington. It was noted that the turnout, though high, is less than Wisconsin's turnout, which is second in the nation.
 2. On a topic related to early voting, one audience member felt that there needed to be changes to nursing home absentee voting, so that voting in the lunchroom or other noisy, public areas, doesn't occur.