

Early Voting Listening Session – Clerk Session
Town of Washington Town Hall
August 11, 2009
Washington, WI

Notes and Feedback

Attendance: 70

- Notes and Feedback about Early Voting in General
 1. There was a suggestion that Internet registration might help alleviate the rush of voters registering during the in-person absentee period.
 2. One clerk wanted assurance that our plans would not require Saturday and Sunday voting.
 3. Some clerks were concerned about a very poor public reaction if the end of in-person absentee voting or early voting would be moved to the Thursday or Friday before the election, and did not feel that a return to excuse absentee voting in this “gap” would be enough to prevent these complaints.
 4. There were some clerks who felt that the voters themselves were the source of many of the problems seen in November 2008. They questioned whether voters should be able to fix their ballot at all, and how we can expect voters to vote correctly when they can’t even fill out the registration correctly. They suggested that, given these circumstances, the rapid changes to election administration can only confuse voters more.
 5. Concerns were expressed that securing voting machines, and the buildings they are housed in, is an untenable challenge.
 6. One of the things suggested, instead of early voting, was to come up with a system to better share best practices for election administration among Wisconsin clerks.

7. The clerks wanted to know what the schedule for legislative changes would be. Adam Harvell of the G.A.B. states that any changes are entirely up to the legislature.

- Notes and Feedback about Early Voting Costs

1. One clerk opined that early voting is an attempt to fix a problem only found in Milwaukee and Dane Counties, and that early voting is simply running up a bill for everyone in the state just for those two counties.
2. There were concerns with both the logistics and the costs associated with testing voting machines, and the additional round of testing that could be required if early voting is implemented.
3. By show of hands, only 1/3 of clerks in attendance were full-time clerks. The rest were part-time.
4. One clerk wanted to know if the G.A.B. had any plans to reimburse municipalities for the extra costs associated with early voting.
5. A suggestion was made that money would be better spent on educating the public about the current system.
6. It was suggested that early voting was part of an ongoing trend of the legislature passing unfunded mandates.

- Notes and Feedback about Need for Early Voting

1. Several clerks suggested that problems with in-person absentee voting are endemic to large municipalities, and they did not see why they should be forced to change a system working for them just to “solve their problems.” By show of hands, about half of the room felt there was no need for changes to the current system.
2. One clerk said the only way they would support any changes, at all, would be if any changes were optional.

3. Several clerks felt that the problems with in-person absentee voting could be solved administratively, instead of requiring legislative changes.
 4. About 1/3 of the room, by show of hands, said they had less than 20 absentee requests total.
- Notes and Feedback about SVRS
 1. Clerks expressed concerns about the use of SVRS as a poll list due to the limited high-speed internet access in small municipalities.
 - Notes and Feedback about Option A, Regional Early Voting Districts
 1. One clerk suggested that we needed to include estimates for programming costs for Option A when discussing advantages and disadvantages.
 2. There were questions about how a region would get election results to the municipalities on Election Day.
 3. Several clerks felt that regional voting districts would result in heavy voter confusion, which defeats the purpose of the early voting initiative.
 4. The clerks questioned how fair it was to pass the burden of election administration, particularly for small municipalities, onto the staff and budget of the county clerk.
 5. There were concerns that there would be voter complaints when the county seat is not in a central location, which would then require onerous amounts of travel when compared to the current system.
 6. By show of hands, no clerks supported Option A.
 - Notes and Feedback about Option B, Municipalities Opt-In
 1. It was felt that Option B would confuse voters in small municipalities surrounding a city that opted in, particularly if that larger city also had Saturday and Sunday voting.

2. There was a suggestion that Option B include a population threshold, perhaps making it so that municipalities under 2,500 would not have the option to offer early voting.
 3. By show of hands, only a small handful of clerks supported Option B.
- Notes and Feedback about Option C, Streamlining In-Person Absentee
 1. The clerk for the City of Eau Claire stated that she would support Option C because she felt it would cost less with some of the streamlining. She said that she did have some concerns, however, about ballot secrecy and security.
 2. There was a suggestion that Option C retain the absentee application, so as to keep a paper trail, but that the application is shortened to cut down on the time it takes to fill out.
 3. One clerk said that we should streamline the current process before any major overhauls to the process are considered.
 4. By show of hands, about 1/3 of clerks in this meeting supported Option C.