

Early Voting Listening Session – Clerks/Public Meeting
Rice Lake City Hall – Lakeshore Room
August 12, 2009
Rice Lake, WI

Notes & Feedback

Attendance: 51

- Notes and Feedback on Early Voting in General
 1. Several concerns centered on being able to attract enough poll workers. Cited as causing this difficult was quickly changing procedures that drive away poll workers. The lack of computer literacy in poll workers was also cited as a problem, particularly with use of an e-poll list.
 2. It was noted that many clerks in this area are part-time, and do not have their own offices or are able to maintain office hours. Administration of in-person absentee has be done by appointment, with clerks being willing to meet with in-person absentee voters in the evenings and even on weekends.
 3. It was inquired whether any of the options presented in this meeting would be mandatory for every election, or only for high-turnout elections.
 4. It was inquired why the G.A.B. does not work with the State of Wisconsin DOT and use the driver's license process to register voters. Adam Harevell of the G.A.B. staff noted that the DOT does not require a person to give their actual physical residence, which is a major issue for election administration.
 5. There was some amount of discussion amongst the meeting attendees that the basic thrust of the early voting initiative was to make voting easier for the voter, not the clerks. It was felt that the impact on electors and voters were not fully thought out, and that early voting only means that voters don't have to be responsible anymore. Another attendee felt that voting should be considering a

privilege, and that early voting is proof that it is not so anymore. Furthermore, it was suggested that some problems with the current system could be attributed to voters and voter error, as evidenced during the recount process in Minnesota.

6. It was felt by some that early voting further complicates the recount process and that it adds another layer of complexity were errors can be made.

7. Some in the audience felt that the increase in absentee voting, particularly as seen in November 2008, was a result of campaigns and the media encouraging voters to vote in-person absentee.

- Notes and Feedback on Early Voting Costs

1. Many of the clerks in the room expressed concerns about the costs associated with early voting, particularly if administered for 20 days. Some reported that the volume of absentee votes they received was minimal, and the absentee voters were mainly vote by mail voters. The costs for true early voting were not felt justified by the benefits gained, especially since many municipalities are in a levy freeze.

2. The county clerk for Washburn County said that she only has a staff of two people that cannot take on any more work. Her office cannot handle elections, cannot afford the overtime the elections would require, and can't afford new machines. Beyond that, the programming costs for elections would increase if early voting is adopted.

3. Two suggestions of cutting expenses were dropping the requirement for polls to open at 7 am, and to allow small municipalities to cut back to two poll workers instead of two, not just for early voting but for Election Day itself.

- Notes and Feedback on Vote Integrity and Security

1. The security of voting machines was a concern, since many town hall locations in this region are not secure, which would require clerks to transport machines daily to a secure location.

2. Members of the audience stated that they were worried that both vote totals and individual votes could be discovered due to the adoption of early voting. One person stated that “nothing in government can’t be leaked,” and was unable to see how the number of early voters wouldn’t be released early, nor how the vote tallies wouldn’t be leaked. Another audience member was worried that the scenario where only one voter in a small municipality voted early would lead to being able to know exactly how that person voted. When the discussion turned to being able, under current process, to see the ballot of an individual with their name written on the absentee envelope, it was stated that a poll worker would have to deliberately do such a thing, and that in the end it comes down to being able to trust election administrators.
- Notes and Feedback on Option A, Region Early Voting Districts
 1. It was noted that Wisconsin is unusual in how municipalities run their elections, and how other states run their elections at the county level. It was stated that election administration is costly to municipalities, and that clerks and clerk staff turn over too often to keep up with regulations. For these reasons, the attendee stated that she would not necessarily be against the county administering early voting, if not elections in general.
 2. One audience member had concerns that Option A would cause transportation issues for disabled and elderly voters, who might have to travel farther to an early vote center, of which there may only be one in a county, as opposed to being able to go to their municipal clerk.
 3. There were logistical concerns about operating elections on a county-wide basis. Concerns included how same-day registrations at the early voting location would get back to the municipalities, how lists of early voters would get to the municipalities before Election Day and that the counties would now have to be able to handle an influx of voter registrations.

- Notes and Feedback on Option B, Municipalities Opt-In
 1. The Washburn County Clerk supported Option B, with the caveat that the county would not be responsible for any costs.
 2. The clerk for the City of Rice Lake stated that she would support Option B, because she feels that she has the staff and the technology to administer true early voting. She felt that the current process was “cumbersome, that the number of absentee envelopes received was time consuming to deal with on Election Day, and that it is disruptive to the voter experience on Election Day. However, she expressed concerns about the mandated 20 day period, stating that she would instead want to offer early voting for the five calendar days prior to the election, and that she would not support weekend hours, or hours after normal close of business.
- Notes and Feedback on Option C, Streamline In-Person Absentee
 1. In terms of cost concerns, since the state, counties and municipalities are all in a financial crunch, Option C was felt by many to be the most economically feasible choice and the choice that gives the most return for the costs of implementation.
 2. One audience member felt that the removal of the envelope would be a welcome improvement, cutting out the time spent both filling out the envelope and opening the envelope at the polling place.
 3. Another audience member liked the idea of eliminating the absentee application, because the original intent of the application is that it was supposed to be sent out before the ballot was sent, which doesn’t make sense with in-person absentee. Streamlining was felt to reduce the expense of both the absentee application and the absentee envelope.
 4. It was questioned whether a sign-in sheet would even be needed, if there would be a way to include the information that would be contained on a sign-in sheet on the absentee log instead.