

League of Women Voters' Annual Meeting
Early Voting Feedback and Listening Session 1 –
Friday, May 29, 2009
Manitowoc, WI

Notes & Feedback

• **Current In-Person Absentee Process: Issues & Comments**

1. Taking away the absentee envelope does not necessarily eliminate all paperwork. The absentee ballot log is what often causes the extra paperwork, especially for clerks who do not use SVRS to track their absentee ballots.
2. Sunday voting was suggested to improve the current in-person absentee practice.
3. The current in-person absentee process, by itself, may cause an increase in turnout, since voters are currently unaware they can vote early in-person absentee at the municipal clerk's office. G.A.B should publicize more the availability of in-person absentee.
4. Paper, long lines, and the name absentee voting are all primary issues with the current practice. Of these, however, the name used for in-person absentee was considered a major problem. The current name "in-person absentee voting" is not descriptive enough for people to know they can vote early in the clerk's office without having to send and receive ballots in the mail. There was a generally positive reception to the name "advance voting" even if no other changes occur with early voting.
5. Even if no changes are made to the current process there should be early voting available on Saturdays.
6. The question of why Wisconsin does not have voter registration through the DMV was asked.

- **General Reactions and Questions about True Early Voting**

1. Why are municipal clerks against true early voting? Our response: Some are, perhaps, though we have not collected the feedback to know the attitudes of clerks toward any proposed changes to in-person absentee voting,
2. It was noted that the early vote options we presented leave only 8 weeks between primary and general elections - how will this affect campaigns?
3. The general consensus of the audience was that it makes a lot of sense to end voting on Fridays before an election.
4. What percent of voters would be interested in early voting? Our answer was 16 to 40 percent, based upon the current percentage of in-person absentee voting as the low end, and 40% as the highest percentage seen in the research regarding voter turnout.
5. What are ballot styles? Some confusion regarding this term arose, which suggests that our presentation needs to explain this term better.
6. How would early voting affect Special Registration Deputies? We explained that early voting would not affect SRDs.
7. It was commented that e-poll lists would help tremendously, and would be of great use under current election practices.
8. Are votes safe in the DRE voting machine? Concerns regarding hackers, static discharges, other mechanical/computer issues were raised.
9. The cost and number of poll workers required for the early vote options presented was asked. We gave approximately \$7,000 as a figure based upon three poll workers for 15 days for 13 hours a day at \$12.00/hr. We also explained that this was a ceiling, and that these costs could be lowered by paying the poll workers less, using the clerks' office staff to man the early voting sites, or using two poll workers instead of three, etc.

10. Whether the early vote is actually being counted before Election Day was asked. We explained that tabulation should not occur until Election Day. A concern with secured receptacles was whether people would feel that their vote will actually be counted, since currently they see a machine reading their Election Day ballot.

11. How any early vote changes would be paid for was asked. We responded that at this point in time, we do not know what the exact costs are and what the funding sources for those costs would be.

- **Opinions & Comments on Regional Early Voting Districts - Option A**

1. Difficulties in relationships between municipal and county clerks' offices were brought up as a possible detriment to this plan.
2. How will people decide to pay for expenditures? What are the available funding sources - municipal, county, state, federal? We explained that it is currently too early to know exactly what the breakdown to the counties or participating municipalities would be.
3. The audience seemed split on the issue of whether this option would confuse voters or would assist them. One respondent felt that a consistent place for early voting by municipality is good, yet running early voting at the county level is better. Another respondent felt that running early voting at the county level is confusing because people want to vote where they always voted instead of traveling to another municipality within a regional district.

- **Opinions & Comments on Municipalities Opting Into Early Voting – Option B**

1. Whether municipalities would be able to opt-in for one election at a time, or whether it would be more permanent was asked. We stated that this is an open question and that we desired their feedback on the subject.

2. We received varied answers on this topic. One respondent suggested it would be very confusing to know whether early voting was available for a given election. But another respondent felt that early voting should be need based, since it would be more burdensome to manage during elections with fewer than 10% voter turnout.

Following on this, a respondent noted that smaller municipalities do not experience the same voter inconveniences on Election Day as larger municipalities. Thus, the respondent would like flexibility for those smaller municipalities to opt out. This would leave the decision to participate in early voting up to the municipalities. Still another respondent brought up political considerations, where if early voters belonged to one party, municipal governing bodies may decide to opt in or opt out to further certain political ends.

3. Some audience members were concerned that opting into early voting would increase the balkanization of voting procedures across the state. They were concerned, as GAB staff has been, that having different procedures in different towns might cause massive confusion and make things difficult for voters moving into Wisconsin, or from different Wisconsin municipalities.
4. There seemed to be a favorable response to requiring municipalities with a certain population to automatically be “forced” to opt into early voting, much like how reporting by wards is currently tied to population.

- **Opinions & Comments on Streamlining In-Person Absentee – Option C**

1. Regarding voter fraud, a concern was brought up that if there is no envelope, will someone make sure you’re eligible to vote, and could you go to more than one early vote site? We explained this kind of behavior occurs under the current practice (though rarely), and without e-poll lists it would be difficult to catch. However, ineligible voters who vote at more than one early vote site would be caught post-Election Day and prosecuted for voter fraud. We also explained that all of the current safeguards present on Election Day (registration

verification, felon lists, and proof of residency requirements) would be in place for early voting.

2. The audience overall consensus was that e-poll lists would help tremendously with this option.
3. It was also agreed that not having the in-person absentee envelopes would save lots of time on Election Day.
4. The savings on paper & supplies was noted by this audience as an advantage. Not requiring more equipment was also noted as being an advantage in the current economy.

- **Vote By Mail Opinions**

1. The audience had a bit to say about vote by mail as an option. One respondent felt that vote by mail was a great idea, but saw problems with combining this with Wisconsin's same day registration tradition.
2. The audience wanted to know whether vote by mail would increase voter turnout, which was a major goal for this audience group. We were asked the current percentage of voter turnout by mail in elections, which we will research more before presenting again.
3. Two respondents had families that vote by mail. One with family in Washington felt that being able to vote by mail is wonderful. Yet, the other pointed out the large number of referenda on ballots in vote by mail states. With a large number of referenda on a ballot, it can take a lot more time to vote. This makes vote by mail a more attractive option for these states, since voting lines would be exceptionally long with such a large amount of referenda on a typical ballot.