

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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Pew: Wisconsin Leads Nation in Elections

MADISON, WI – Wisconsin’s elections ranked first in the nation in 2008 and eighth in 2010, according to a new comprehensive study of U.S. elections by the Pew Center on the States.

“This study reflects very well on the state of Wisconsin, its engaged voters and the thousands of local election officials who serve them,” said Kevin J. Kennedy, the state’s chief election officer. “For Wisconsin policymakers and residents, it provides a solid basis for confidence in our elections as well as pride in our hard-working, dedicated election officials.”

Full details of the study, including interactive graphics, are available at: www.pewstates.org/epi.

For this study, Pew created an index of 17 statistical measures of election administration under the direction of Professor Charles Stewart of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in consultation with a group of state and local election officials, academic scholars and information technology specialists. Kennedy and UW Political Science Professor Barry Burden served on the study group.

Data for the study came from public reports and academic research. Most importantly, the statistical information is consistently gathered across states and over a period of several election cycles. This enables election officials, scholars, and the general public to compare a state’s performance over time and in conjunction with other states. Data for the November 2012 election will be available once it is published, likely later this year.

Kennedy said several factors contributed to Wisconsin’s ranking as a high-performing state. They include: consistently high voter turnout, low rates of non-voting due to registration or absentee ballot problems, few provisional ballots and comparatively short wait times. One key element to Wisconsin’s high performance is the availability of voting information look-up tools on the Government Accountability Board’s voter services website: <http://myvote.wi.gov>. Wisconsin was one of six states to provide full access to essential voter information on its website, including voter registration status, sample ballot information and polling place location.

The integrity of voting equipment used in Wisconsin also received high marks for being accurate and easy to audit. Wisconsin conducts random post-election audits of its voting equipment following each general election.

Elections Division Administrator Michael Haas noted that while the Pew Index did not measure local control of elections, that is one attribute that likely contributed to Wisconsin’s high

rankings. With 1,851 municipal clerks and 72 county clerks, Wisconsin has the most decentralized and locally-administered election system in the country. “While this structure creates some challenges in election administration, it is also a strength that in Wisconsin, for the most part, elections are run by the voters’ friends and neighbors,” Haas said.

The Pew Center on the States has dedicated significant resources to evaluating and modernizing elections in the United States. Pew involves state and local election officials, noted academic scholars, and industry leaders in its efforts. The Elections Performance Index provides a look behind the curtain of this essential element of our governmental process. Now this information is readily available for members of the public to see for themselves.

Wisconsin dropped from first to eighth between 2008 and 2010 because two of the 17 statistics for which Wisconsin received high marks were not included in 2010: voting technology accuracy and voting wait times. Nationwide data for voting technology accuracy, as measured by the difference between the total number of voters and the number of votes for president (residual vote rate) was not available for 2010 because it was not a presidential election year. Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s data on voting wait times was also not collected in 2010.

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The Government Accountability Board is responsible for administration and enforcement of campaign finance, elections, ethics and lobbying laws in Wisconsin. The board is made up of six non-partisan, former judges and is supported by an agency of non-partisan staff members. Additional information about the mission of the Government Accountability Board is available by telephone at **608-266-8005**, by email at **gab@wi.gov**, or online at **<http://gab.wi.gov>**.