

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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Voter Turnout Estimated at 30 to 35 percent for May 8 Recall Primary

MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Government Accountability Board is predicting that between 30 and 35 percent of the voting age population – or approximately 1.3 to 1.5 million people – will turn out to vote in the Tuesday, May 8 Recall Primary.

“Wisconsin has never had a statewide recall primary, which makes predicting turnout difficult,” said Kevin Kennedy, director and general counsel of the G.A.B. “We typically look at history for guidance in predicting turnout. In the last few decades, turnout for September partisan primaries has ranged from 9 percent to 25 percent, but we believe turnout will be higher in this primary because of the strong public interest in the recall elections.”

Kennedy noted that Wisconsin has a hotly contested primary between several candidates for the Democratic nomination for Governor, as well as a smaller Democratic primary field for Lt. Governor. Also, the Republican primary for Governor will bring out voters. In addition, there are four Democratic primaries for State Senate, which include candidates put up by the Republican Party to move the date of the final State Senate recall elections to date to June 5.

Historically, the highest voter turnout in a September partisan primary in the last 50 years was 27.9 percent in 1964. The highest turnout in the past decade was 22.5 percent in 2002. The highest turnout recorded was 38.9 percent in 1952. Wisconsin’s 2011 voting age population is 4,352,762 people. Statistics on past voter turnout and current voter registration are available at <http://gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/statistics>.

Wisconsin’s open primary system does not require voters to declare a party. On May 8, a person may only cast one vote for each office – Governor, Lt. Governor, and State Senator – but may cross over to vote in different parties’ primaries. This is because these recall elections are separate election events that happen to be held on the same day, unlike a regularly scheduled primary election.

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The Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) is responsible for administration and enforcement of campaign finance, elections, ethics and lobbying laws in Wisconsin. The G.A.B. is made up of six non-partisan, former judges and is supported by an agency of non-partisan staff members.