

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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Election Day Update

MADISON, WI – Wisconsin election officials are reporting heavier than normal voter turnout but no major problems on Election Day, according to the Government Accountability Board.

“We are receiving anecdotal reports of heavy turnout around the state for a gubernatorial election,” said Kevin J. Kennedy, Wisconsin’s chief election official. “But so far, the problems reported to us have been relatively minor.”

Problems reported to the G.A.B. include complaints about political signs being closer than 100 feet to polling places, problems with voter registration and problems with voters being asked to show a photo ID when no ID is required.

Last week, Kennedy projected that 2.5 million Wisconsin residents – or 56.5 percent of eligible voters – will vote in the 2014 General Election, which would be a record for a November gubernatorial election.

“We are not able to track turnout in real-time, but based on what we’re hearing from clerks, we are on track,” said Kennedy. “Also, absentee voting numbers coming in are strong.”

Of the 306,609 absentee ballots issued by clerks who track them in the Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS), 294,113 or 96 percent have been returned so far. Voters must mail absentee ballots by today, and they must arrive in the clerk’s office by 4 p.m. Friday to be counted.

Of the 294,113 ballots recorded through 4 p.m. Tuesday, November 4, there were 216,825 early votes cast in clerks’ offices and there were 77,288 ballots cast by mail or other absentee voting methods. There were 12,539 absentee ballots issued that had not yet been returned. “Ballots cast” means ballots completed and returned to the municipal clerk’s office. Those ballots are stored securely and then counted on Election Day at the polls or an alternate location.

In June 2012, there were 153,854 in-person (early) absentee votes and 265,427 total absentee votes. Turnout in the June 2012 recall was 2,516,371 voters, or 57.8 percent. Historically, the highest voter turnout in a November gubernatorial election in the last 50 years was 52.4 percent in 1962.

Kennedy said 294,113 absentee votes would be 11.76 percent of 2.5 million votes, which is in the high range for absentee votes in gubernatorial elections. Absentee voting in the 2010 gubernatorial election and the 2012 recall election was 10.5 percent. The percentage of absentee votes in the last two presidential elections was 21.5 percent.

Kennedy cautioned that the absentee numbers released are still partial and preliminary. Out of Wisconsin’s 1,852 municipal clerks, about 360 use SVRS to track absentee ballots. However, those are the state’s larger municipalities, which cover 69 percent of Wisconsin’s voters.

The G.A.B. also released an updated spreadsheet of absentee ballots recorded by municipality. The spreadsheet contains more than the roughly 360 municipalities that track all absentee ballots in SVRS. A few hundred clerks use SVRS to track only their military and overseas absentee ballots, not regular absentee ballots.

Because of changes in election law moving the primary election date and changing the time period for in-person absentee voting in clerks’ offices, direct comparisons between these preliminary numbers and preliminary numbers from previous elections are difficult. Also, the number of clerks who track absentee ballots in SVRS has changed over time. Clerks tracked about 43 percent of absentee ballots in SVRS for the 2008 Presidential and General Election, compared to nearly 67 percent during the 2012 Gubernatorial Recall Election.

Here are some historical numbers of turnout and absentee ballots cast in recent elections:

Election Date	Total Voters	Turnout	Total Absentee Votes	Absentee Votes in Clerk’s Office
11/6/2012	3,080,628	70.4%	664,597	514,398
6/5/2012	2,516,371	57.8%	265,427	153,854
11/2/2010	2,185,017	49.7%	230,744	122,712
11/4/2008	2,996,869	69.2%	647,175	NA

Statistical reports filed by clerks in 2008 did not break out the number of absentee votes cast in-person in the clerk’s office.

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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. consists of six non-partisan, former judges and is supported by an agency of non-partisan staff members.