

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

212 E. Washington Ave., Third Floor • Madison, WI 53703 • gab@wi.gov • (608) 266-8005 • Help Desk (608) 261-2028 • <http://gab.wi.gov>

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
Reid Magney, 608-267-7887

Presidential Commission on Election Administration Recognizes Wisconsin's Innovations

MADISON, WI – The final report released Wednesday by the [Presidential Commission on Election Administration](#) recognizes two of Wisconsin's innovative election practices and recommends they be adopted by other states.

“The Government Accountability Board members and I are gratified that this bipartisan presidential commission has recognized Wisconsin's innovative approaches to improving polling place accessibility and collecting polling place data,” said Director and General Counsel Kevin J. Kennedy, who testified before the commission on September 20, 2013, in Cincinnati.

Among the commission's many recommendations: States should survey and audit polling places to determine their accessibility to persons with disabilities, and local jurisdictions should gather and report voting-related transaction data for the purpose of improving the voter experience. Both recommendations recognized Wisconsin's national leadership in these areas.

“The Wisconsin Government Accountability Board performs a survey and audit of polling places that stands as a model. Its Polling Place Accessibility Survey asks a series of questions regarding parking, pathways, entrances, interior routes, and voting areas,” the report said. “The Board's 2013 Report was derived from 1,614 polling place audits conducted over the course of 16 elections, which required the visiting of 921 municipalities located in 66 Wisconsin counties. The audit was comprehensive and identified shortcomings that deserved attention. Following the audit, localities then worked to address the problems the audit revealed.”

On data collection, the report said: “First, local jurisdictions can learn a lot from the state of Wisconsin, which, despite having the most decentralized election administration system in the country, also has one of the most thorough election data-gathering programs.”

President Obama appointed the commission in March 2013 following his State of the Union speech pledge to identify non-partisan ways to shorten lines at polling places, promote the efficient conduct of elections, and provide better access to the polls for all voters. Its mission is to identify best practices in election administration and make recommendations to improve the voting experience for all Americans.

The commission concluded that, “as a general rule, no voter should have to wait more than half an hour in order to have an opportunity to vote.” One of the key recommendations to accomplish that is “modernization of the registration process through continued expansion of online voter registration and expanded state collaboration in improving the accuracy of voter lists.”

Wisconsin state law does not currently permit online voter registration or sharing the state's voter list with other states to improve accuracy and prevent fraud, Kennedy noted. Legislation to allow online voter registration is part of an omnibus election bill that passed the Assembly in 2013. The bill, AB 225, has had a hearing in December before the Senate Committee on Elections and Urban Affairs.

“Legislation that enables online voter registration would make a tremendous leap forward in the administration of elections in Wisconsin,” Kennedy said. “By taking advantage of innovative technology, we can significantly improve the accuracy, cost-effectiveness, efficiency and integrity of Wisconsin's voter registration system.”

More information about the G.A.B.'s perspective on online voter registration is available here: <http://gab.wi.gov/publications/other/senate-committee-testimony-12-18-2013>.

In September, Kennedy testified before the commission on a panel of state election officials who discussed best practices from their states that could be adopted nationally. Kennedy highlighted Wisconsin's largely non-partisan system of election administration, and the importance of using data and new technology to improve the voting experience.

“Election administrators, legislators and government executives need to know and believe that ‘It is all about the voter,’ ” Kennedy testified. “As we craft laws and develop administrative procedures for elections, we have to focus on the principle that the voters and their right to participate in the political process are paramount.”

Kennedy has been Wisconsin's chief elections officer for 30 years, first as executive director of the former State Elections Board and since 2007 as director of the Government Accountability Board.

Wisconsin has received consistently-high rankings in national surveys of voter turnout and other measures of effective election administration. Wisconsin ranked first in the nation in the [Pew Center's Election Performance Index](#) for its performance in the 2008 Presidential Election. Rankings for 2012 have not yet been released.

“While the work of our almost 2,000 local election officials contributes to this success,” Kennedy said, “these accomplishments would not be possible without the dedication and commitment of the staff of the G.A.B.”

The bipartisan commission is comprised of distinguished election administrators and representatives of successful customer service-oriented businesses who bring experience drawn from the private and public sectors to help identify best practices in election administration. Its co-chairs, Robert F. Bauer and Benjamin L. Ginsberg, played key roles in the 2012 campaigns of President Obama and Governor Mitt Romney.

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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.