

# Wisconsin Elections Commission

## State of Wisconsin

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### **Low-Turnout Partisan Primary Gives Election Officials Practice for November**

MADISON, WI – Wisconsin’s low-turnout Partisan Primary on Tuesday went relatively smoothly and showed state and local election officials some issues that still need to be addressed before the November 3, 2020 Presidential Election.

“There were no major issues in Tuesday’s primary thanks to the hard work of Wisconsin’s clerks, the tens of thousands of poll workers and the Wisconsin National Guard,” said Meagan Wolfe, administrator of the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

“In the coming weeks, the WEC staff will be gathering information about the primary from voters, local election officials and other groups interested in elections,” Wolfe said. “Our goal is to learn from any of the small issues we experienced to make sure they do not become big issues in November.”

The Wisconsin National Guard supplied approximately 675 service members to serve as poll workers in their home communities on Tuesday, and Wolfe said the Guard’s presence made a significant difference.

“Guard members were able to fill poll worker shortages that clerks anticipated before the election, as well as last-minute no-shows,” Wolfe said. “The Guard was flexible and did a fantastic job for us again this week.”

“While the WEC and clerks are thankful for the National Guard’s service, these shortages highlight the need for many more Wisconsin residents and organizations to fill the need for poll workers,” Wolfe said. “The State of Wisconsin and the WEC will do what we can to help local clerks with recruitment, but we are asking local community members to step up for November.”

Anyone interested in becoming a poll worker should contact their local municipal clerk’s office for more information or visit the MyVote Wisconsin website: <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/PollWorker>.

The Elections Commission does not yet have an estimate of Tuesday’s voter turnout because there were no statewide primaries on the ballot, which would indicate the total number of ballots cast. Wisconsin does not have a statewide election night reporting system for unofficial results,

and counties are not required to report officials results until later next week. Statistical reports used for final turnout numbers can take one month to be filed by clerks.

“August partisan primaries are typically low-turnout elections,” Wolfe said. “We did not receive any reports from clerks of higher turnout that would contradict that experience.” In August 2018, when there were statewide primaries, there were 1,041,837 voters, or 23% of the voting-age population. In August 2016, with no statewide primaries, turnout was 645,619, or 14.5% of the voting-age population.

Based on reports from the statewide voter registration system, there were more than 593,000 absentee ballots returned to clerks for the partisan primary, Wolfe said. Some clerks are still catching up with data entry, so the numbers will likely increase somewhat. Compared to August 2016, there were 76,529 absentee ballots counted.

Wolfe noted that some municipalities reported large numbers of absentee ballots arriving by mail or being dropped off by voters on Tuesday, which is much different than any election prior to the Spring Election in April. For that election only, ballots could be counted if they were postmarked by election day but received by April 13 because of a federal court order.

There was also come confusion in Milwaukee about where voters should return their ballots on Election Day. Most of Wisconsin’s 1,850 municipalities count absentee ballots at the polling place where the voter would normally vote, but 35 cities, villages and towns, including Milwaukee, count their absentee ballots at a central location. Voters should check with their municipal election official to find out about drop off opportunities in their community for November,

“We will be working with clerks to develop clearer messaging for voters on absentee ballot return locations and times that takes into account the differences between central count absentee municipalities and polling place absentee count municipalities,” Wolfe said.

At the WEC’s next regularly scheduled meeting on September 1, the commissioners will receive a report from staff about updated plans for the November election, Wolfe said.

For November 2020, 807,440 voters have already requested an absentee ballot. On September 1, the WEC will mail approximately 2.6 million packets of information about voting in the November election to every registered voter without an absentee request on file. The mailing includes an absentee application and a postage-paid return envelope.

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The Wisconsin Elections Commission is responsible for administration and enforcement of election laws in Wisconsin. The Commission is made up of six Commissioners – four appointed directly by the State Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the Assembly and the Minority Leaders in the State Senate and Assembly. The remaining two Commissioners are by the Governor with confirmation by the State Senate from lists of former municipal and county clerks submitted by the legislative leadership in each party.