

Wisconsin Elections Commission

State of Wisconsin

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
November 1, 2018

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Media Advisory and Briefing: Covering the November 2018 General Election

Madison, WI – Meagan Wolfe, Wisconsin’s chief elections official, will hold an on-the-record briefing for news media at 1 p.m. Friday, November 2.

The number to call is 1-855-947-8255, and the passcode is 8498 252#. Wolfe will start by discussing preparations for Tuesday’s General Election, but is mostly available to answer your questions.

Due to high state and national media interest in covering Wisconsin’s midterm General Election, the Wisconsin Elections Commission is also issuing this advisory with guidance for news reporters and photographers. This advisory is designed for planning purposes, but news media are free to quote from it as well.

At the Polling Place

Members of the news media may be inside polling places on Election Day, subject to most of the same restrictions on other election observers. Please refer to our election observer brochure (<http://elections.wi.gov/publications/brochures/observer-rules>) for details. Reporters and photographers may wish to print the brochure to take with them in the event there are questions.

Unlike voters and regular election observers, media may record sound, images and video inside the polling place as long as it is not disruptive. You may use cell phones or tablets to take pictures and video, something regular observers are not allowed to do. However, no media may broadcast live or tape broadcasts (stand-ups) from within a polling place because of the potential to disrupt or distract the process.

When you arrive at a polling place, find the Chief Election Inspector and notify him or her who you are and what organization you represent. The Chief Inspector keeps a list of media, but you are not required to sign in.

You may not contact (interview) voters when they are in line waiting to vote. The only people authorized to have contact with voters prior to voting are the election workers. Please do not take images/video of voters’ faces as they’re going into polling places, which some voters find intimidating. Photographing lines of voters should not be a problem. After voters have finished, you are free to ask them for interviews outside the polling place. Please do not block the exits.

Which polling places are good candidates for stories? The best sources of information about polling places are municipal clerks, who are responsible them. A directory of clerks is on our website: <http://elections.wi.gov/clerks/directory>.

Election Day Issues and Misinformation

For updates on how voting is going on Election Day, follow our Twitter feed: http://twitter.com/WI_Elections. When we know something, we'll post it.

We also realize that there may be misinformation and disinformation out there about elections and voting. We will be monitoring social media and putting out correct information when we see errors. If you see something questionable, please contact the Elections Commission.

Cyber Security

There is no evidence that Wisconsin's election systems have ever been compromised. While there were attempts in 2016, they were not successful.

Since then, Wisconsin has taken extraordinary steps to enhance security of its systems and prevent interference with our statewide voter registration system and vote counting systems, working closely with our technology and law enforcement partners in state and federal government. We have also conducted extensive security training with county and municipal clerks.

The Commission has done its best to be as transparent as possible with the public and the media about what did and did not happen in 2016, and what we are doing now. Much more information about election security is available here: <https://elections.wi.gov/elections-voting/security>.

Counting, Reporting and Certifying the Vote

Wisconsin does not have a statewide system for reporting unofficial results on Election Night, and there is not a central website where results will be reported. We do have a link to the 72 county clerk websites, where clerks are required to post unofficial results: <http://elections.wi.gov/clerks/directory/county-websites>. Clerks will be posting unofficial results in a few different formats, including HTML, PDF and spreadsheets. The most reliable and accessible source of statewide totals is the Associated Press, which gathers information from all 72 counties and provides unofficial results to its members. Some media organizations in Wisconsin that are not AP members also collect election results.

After the polls close at 8 p.m., the election workers will count any absentee ballots that have not been counted throughout the day and announce the vote totals for that polling place. They will also take care of the administrative work required before taking the results to the municipal clerk. This activity is a public meeting of the board of local canvassers, and the media and public are welcome to attend. You may also view or photograph the results tapes from voting equipment.

Municipal clerks provide unofficial results to their county clerks, who will post them to the county's website. Under a recently-enacted law, municipal clerks must forward results to the county clerk within two hours of the results being tabulated, and county clerks must post the results within two hours of receiving them from the municipal clerk.

Municipalities are required to post the number of provisional ballots on the internet on Election Night. Provisional ballots are issued to voters who do not have an acceptable ID on Election Day. Voters have until 8 p.m. on Election Day or 4 p.m. on Friday, November 9 to bring an acceptable photo ID to the municipal clerk's office to have their vote counted.

Counties must convene their boards of canvassers by 9 a.m. on Tuesday, November 13 to begin certifying official results. While we expect official results to come in relatively quickly the week after the election, the deadline for counties to provide certified results to the Wisconsin Elections Commission is Tuesday, November 20. The statutory deadline for the Commission to certify statewide results is December 1; however, because that falls on a Saturday the Commission will have until Monday, December 3 to certify results.

Recount Rules

Wisconsin does not have automatic recounts, even if the unofficial results are extremely close. A losing candidate who wants to ask for a recount must wait until the last day a county board of canvassers meets, which is at least one week after the election. The deadline for requesting a recount is three business days after the Elections Commission receives the last statement from a county board of canvassers.

The rules for who may request a recount have changed since 2016, when Wisconsin was the only state to conduct a presidential recount. Only an aggrieved candidate, defined as a candidate for an office whose total votes were within 1 percent of the winner's vote total when at least 4,000 votes were cast or within 40 votes of the winner's total if fewer than 4,000 votes were cast, may request a recount of results for an office.

There is no cost to the losing candidate if the difference between the leading candidate is 0.25 percent or less. If the difference is more than 0.25 percent, the WEC will estimate the cost, which must be paid before the recount begins.

Much more information about recounts is available here: <http://elections.wi.gov/elections-voting/recount>.

Election Day Interviews

News media wishing to set up interviews on Election Day should contact Public Information Officer Reid Magney at 608-267-7887 or email reid.magney@wi.gov.

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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.