

**Election Observer Program**  
**Wisconsin Spring Nonpartisan Election, April 3, 2012**  
**FINAL REPORT**  
May 2012

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Network (hereafter referred to as “the League”) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization which promotes active and informed participation in government, works to increase understanding of selected public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. As a trusted convener concerned about the impact of election laws on voters, the League will be observing elections in Wisconsin in 2012 and providing reports to the Government Accountability Board.

The League recruited and trained 108 volunteers; some as Election Observers assigned to specific polling places for 5 hour shifts and others as Roving Observers who visited several polling places throughout the day. For the April 3 election, the League received reports from 54 Election Observers and 41 Roving Observers, covering a total of 95 polling places located in a wide variety of settings statewide: urban, rural, and suburban. We made intentional efforts to place observers in areas with higher population densities of seniors, students, and minorities.

Some of the issues raised in this report, if not addressed, could lead to more serious problems in the recall and fall elections, which are expected to be more contentious and to bring out more voters to the polls. We offer the following summary of how elections proceeded, based on information gathered from the returned written reports, as well as phone calls, text messages, and questions answered by Election Protection attorneys on Election Day.

**Best Practices**

Almost all of the observers commented on the professional, helpful and friendly attitudes of the election officials they observed. Following are particular best practices which were observed and commended.

1. Greeters placed at entrance doors welcomed, answered questions, directed people and identified special needs. This facilitated the voting process and was especially helpful when voter turnout was high.
2. Clear, visible signage enabled voters to proceed with confidence. Signage helps voters find their way to the right lines as they enter the polling place, especially during peak voting times.
3. Splitting the poll books and creating two alphabetical lines cut waiting time significantly.
4. Knowledgeable Chief Inspectors and poll workers with good training and support created a comfortable, responsible atmosphere throughout the day. Poll workers who were helpful and patient, and who provided clear instructions, were appreciated.
5. “Curb service, required by law, is an important service for physically challenged voters.

## Areas of Concern

1. One of the most frequent problems cited was related to redistricting. People showed up at their usual polling places, only to find out they have been moved to a different polling place. In most cases, voters were politely directed to the appropriate location. At several locations there was some confusion about whose responsibility it was to notify voters of new polling places. Some voters found their names had been removed from the poll books because their municipality had sent notices to people who now had post office boxes. Those were returned as “undeliverable” and those voters were taken off the poll books. We were unable to follow up with people who had to relocate to vote to ascertain if they actually did so. Some voters had time/transportation issues.
2. There were twelve reports of problems related to the new 28 day residency requirement for registration at the polls. A few Chief Inspectors were confused and gave poll workers misinformation. Some people had to return with appropriate proof-of-residency documentation; a few had difficulty finding useable documents. Students in particular will have difficulty in June.
3. There were several reports of ballots being printed incorrectly, rejected from machines, or oversized and unable to fit in the scanning machines. Data had to be physically transferred to new ballots and re-fed to scanners by volunteers. Some ballots were trimmed so they could be scanned.
4. Many voters were confused by the April 3 ballot; needing to vote for only one candidate in the presidential preference category. Most places began instructing voters as ballots were handed out about voting for a presidential candidate in only one party, but other voters had to ask for assistance and numerous ballots were recast.
5. Some touch screen voting machines were misplaced, covered and/or unattended. At one location, the machine was not used because “the ink is expensive.” There was one report of a voting machine breaking down which was not able to be repaired during the day.
6. Some people found that their name was not in the poll book, even though they were in the right polling place and had voted there before. It is important to maintain the ability to register to vote at the polls on Election Day in order to maximize the opportunity for eligible citizens to vote.
7. One couple currently living with in-laws discovered that the wife could vote in their previous ward but the husband was not listed in either place. After two attempts he could not produce the necessary documentation needed to prove residency and thus was unable to vote.
8. A few places were unsure of the Voter ID injunction. Most were corrected by the Chief Inspector.
9. At several locations, poll workers addressed political issues in conversations amongst themselves and in some cases with voters. They were not talking about items on the ballot.
10. Signage is an important element in every polling place and contributes significantly in helping voters move efficiently through the election process. Reports were made about old, worn-out signs and/or poor placement of signs inside and outside the polling place. In some sites, signs were obscured by voters when there was a line. People were not sure which line to get in for registration or for their own part of the alphabet when voting.
11. We received reports of several small polling places which will not accommodate high voter turnout. In some cases, designated parking spots presented long walking distances

to entrances; one was mostly uphill which would be a hardship for elderly and/or disabled voters. A few polling places had separate entrances for registration, and there was not good signage pointing people to the right entrance.

12. There were four reported incidents of people refusing to sign the poll book as a protest.

### **Recommendations**

1. Standard training plays a significant role in enabling poll workers to do their job well. As laws are changed, challenges are presented to voters as well as election officials. Access to up-to-date, easily available information, standards for organization, and consistent interpretation of rules and regulations lend confidence to the election process for all.
2. Visible signage at the polling place including recognition of poll workers and their roles by way of name tags is a relatively easy way to accommodate voters. Signs should be visible not only when the polling place is empty but also when the room fills with people. The “line” to vote often starts when people approach their polling place from the street, parking lot or sidewalk.
3. At all times, but especially during peak times, having a person assigned to ensure that people are in the correct line, have appropriate documentation if necessary and any particular instructions about voting (such as voting for only one presidential preference candidate) would greatly facilitate the voting process and assuage confusion.
4. It would be helpful to have a designated poll worker be assigned to the touch screen machine to ensure it is working, its presence is visible and available, and that any voter who needs to use it has adequate instructions and assistance if needed.
5. Do a better job of educating voters about new districts before the expected high-turnout recall and fall elections. Apparently a postcard is not enough. Election officials and advocates should remind people in the last 1-2 weeks before the election that districts have changed and they might have a new polling place. The reminders should encourage voters to confirm their polling place by going to the Voter Public Access website or calling their municipal clerk. This will be more important in the high-turnout elections expected for the remainder of the year.

### **Concerns for future elections**

1. Students at universities, colleges and technical schools will be in a state of transition for the June election. Many will have moved either away from their college community or to a new, summer address that may or may not be in the same ward. Clear information on the 28 day residency requirement, what documents are sufficient, and /or how to obtain an absentee ballot will be imperative to enable them to vote.
2. Residency documents tend to be a significant issue for renters, elderly people, homeless, displaced and disabled people. More people are using online banking and bill paying services. This is an area that should be reviewed, and new legislation should be considered to update the proof-of-residency requirements.
3. Training and education. All poll workers need access to standardized training and information on laws, regulations and how to handle a variety of circumstances. Voters need ongoing information on where to vote, how to register, absentee and/or provisional ballots, what proof-of-residency documents are needed and how to obtain them in order to participate in the election process in Wisconsin.