

Looking Forward to the Challenges of 2016

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In 2016, Wisconsin's voter ID law is in place for all elections. Voters, even veterans and older people who are registered and have voted many times before, will not be able to vote this year without a proper government-issued identification. For many the voter ID law will just be inconvenient, but for the elderly, college students, city dwellers who rely on public transportation, people who have moved and those who frequently travel, it may mean the loss of the right to vote.

UNION, WI - "I spent all day trying to get an ID for my mother," Joe from Union Township told me. His mother, age 84, recently gave up her driver's license because of a vision problem. She'd moved into an apartment in Eau Claire.

By changing her address and surrendering her drivers' license, Joe's mom was without the necessary current "government ID" she needed to legally vote in 2016.

Happy New Year! And welcome to Wisconsin, a state that now has some of the strictest voter identification laws in the nation.

Even if you're registered and have voted many times before, you will not be able to vote this year without a proper government-issued identification. And "government-issued" doesn't always mean what it says. For example, a veteran cannot use an ID issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs for voting.

After four years in the courts, Wisconsin's voter ID law is in place for all elections.

Voters in 2016 will go to the polls for nonpartisan primaries on February 16th. On April 5th Wisconsin will elect a new Supreme Court justice and many local officials including every county board member. April 5th is also Wisconsin's Presidential Preference vote. Delegates, who will be elected in separate partisan caucuses, will be sent to the national conventions to nominate presidential candidates.

The partisan primary (not including president) will be on August 9th. The General Election for President, all members of the State Assembly, half the State Senate and other local partisan positions will be held November 8th.

For eighty percent of voters the voter ID law will be no more inconvenient than remembering to take your wallet to the polls. But voting will be more of a hassle for some elderly, college students, city dwellers who rely on public transportation, people who have moved and those who frequently travel.

To increase confusion, and despite firm opposition by the local election clerks, the nonpartisan Government Accountability Board will not exist after June. In a bill recently signed into law by the governor, two partisan commissions will replace the nonpartisan GAB.

As Joe found out, the process of getting an ID may take longer than you planned. The place to start is the local Department of Motor Vehicles office. For many rural residents these offices have severely limited hours. For example, in Buffalo County, the office is only open from 7am to 5 pm on Monday and Wednesday.

DMV office locations can be found at <http://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/online-srvcs/find-dmv/default.aspx>.

IDs are free. You will need to bring proof of your name, date of birth, Wisconsin residency and your social security card (if you have one).

If you cannot vote at the polling place, you will need to vote by mail or during much-restricted early voting hours. For those who travel, hours are so restricted you will likely need to vote by mail. You need a copy of your ID to vote by mail unless you are military or a permanent overseas voter. You can find more voter ID details at <http://www.bringit.wi.gov> .

While the state's political focus will be largely on the 2016 presidential election, the state legislature will continue its One-Hundred and Second Regular Session throughout the spring. Rumors in the Capitol are that this session will adjourn earlier than its scheduled April conclusion.

Expected to pass this spring, with large bipartisan support, are a series of bills aimed at reducing drug addiction. Wisconsin, as well as many other states, has seen an alarming uptick in drug related deaths. These bills will increase funding for treatment alternatives to incarceration – the highly effective Drug Court Program; encourage best practices in prescribing pain medication; federalize some rules related to drug treatment facilities and make illegal the manufacture and use of synthetic urine used to avoid drug tests.

At the end of the session all bills not passed will die. I'll be working to kill several bills that take away local powers to decide, among other things, where industrial sites and sand mines are located and certain actions of school boards.

Wishing everyone a very happy and prosperous 2016. Exercise your right to vote, and remind your friends and family to get that Voter ID now!

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