

Morning voter turnout steady across county

By Ryan Whisner, Union regional editor | Posted: Tuesday, November 4, 2014 9:48 am

Turnout appeared steady, if not even brisk, this morning as Jefferson County-area voters headed to the polls to cast ballots in state and local races and weigh in on referendum questions.

Polling throughout the state was to determine who will be Wisconsin's governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, treasurer and attorney general for the next four years, as well as to choose Congressional and state Assembly and Senate representatives.

Dozens of voters were in line at the Fort Atkinson Municipal Building, some standing in line and others waiting in their warm cars, prior to the polls opening at 7 this morning.

It might have been an indication of a busy day for pollworkers in Wisconsin. The Government Accountability Board predicted that nearly 56.5 percent of eligible voters would cast a ballot in the Badger State.

As of this morning, Jefferson County Clerk Barb Frank said, there were about 49,093 registered voters in the county. Those who have moved or never registered still may register today.

Frank said she was anticipating a fairly high turnout.

In addition to voters going to the polls today, a number of ballots were marked early via absentee voting. Wisconsin election officials said state voters have cast nearly 290,000 absentee votes ahead of today's election.

The state Government Accountability Board, which oversees Wisconsin elections, reported that voters had cast 289,615 absentee ballots as of noon Monday. A little more than 216,361 ballots were cast early in local clerks' offices. The remaining 73,254 ballots were cast by mail or other methods.

The absentee vote easily surpassed the 265,427 absentee votes cast in the 2012 recall election that saw Republican Gov. Scott Walker defeat Democrat Tom Barrett.

About 16,500 absentee ballots that clerks mailed to voters haven't been returned. Those ballots must be postmarked by today and in clerks' offices by 4 p.m. Friday in order to count.

"I know the numbers are up overall, but I think the people still like going to the polls and putting their ballot in (the box)," Frank said.

Comparatively, the November 2010 gubernatorial race attracted 31,767 county residents to the ballot box or 65



AT THE BALLOT BOX

AT THE BALLOT BOX — Jefferson County-area residents were among Americans nationwide who were going to the polls to cast ballots in today's general election. The before-work crowd at the Fort Atkinson Municipal Building experienced long lines as voting began at 7 a.m. For more photos click [here](#).

percent of registered voters. In the June 2012 gubernatorial recall election, a total of 37,596 voters or 77 percent of registered voters, cast ballots.

In the last presidential election in November 2012, a total 44,589 voters or 76 percent of registered voters, filled out ballots.

Frank said the November 2008 presidential election between President Barack Obama and Sen. John McCain drew 43,330 voters for 80 percent of registered voters or 70 percent of eligible voters to the polls.

Meanwhile, Fort Atkinson City Clerk Michelle Ebbert reported at 8:30 this morning that the first hour of the day went by very fast.

She said the initial rush at 7 a.m. lasted about 15 minutes. Some people stood in line for two or three minutes, but otherwise, voters were flowing freely through the polls.

In every election for the past several years, Hjalmar and Jan Roelke of Fort Atkinson try to be first in line, knowing it is going to be a rush day.

“It’s our duty,” Hjalmar said. “I hope all the candidates that everybody votes for get in.”

Ebbert said that following the initial rush, at any given time, there seemed to be about 20 voters in the municipal gym this morning.

“They keep coming in pretty steady,” Ebbert said. “It’s typical that we have nobody in the gym.”

She said she expected Fort Atkinson will meet or exceed the state projected turnout totals.

In Jefferson, City Clerk Rita Baumann said that voting was very steady this morning. Before the polls opened, 6 percent of registered voters already had cast absentee ballots before the election even started.

As of 8:30 a.m., more than 500 ballots, (including absentees, which were in the process of being put into the machines) had been cast.

Baumann noted that Jefferson has 4,151 registered voters.

“We are very steady,” she said of turnout. “I expect it is going to be a big election.”

With Jefferson resident Susan Happ running for attorney general, it was expected that her home community would turn out to cast ballots in that race.

Further north in the Village of Johnson Creek, Clerk/Treasurer Joan Dykstra said there were lines at the polls at 7 a.m.

By 9 a.m., nearly 10 percent of registered voters in the village had cast ballots.

“We don’t have the lines now, but they keep coming,” she said, noting that there have been a lot of new registrants, both actual new voters and those who have changed addresses.

Dykstra projected to match the state estimate of 56 percent with about 1,000 ballots cast by the end of the day.

On the ballot

Polls are open until 8 p.m. Voters do not need an ID to vote in the election, as the U.S. Supreme Court blocked on the requirement while the constitutional challenge of the law was being considered.

A highlight drawing voters to the polls today was the hard-fought Wisconsin governor's race, with its implications for the 2016 presidential campaign.

Republican Gov. Scott Walker was facing voters for the third time in four years as he sought re-election after winning a 2012 recall.

Democratic challenger Mary Burke has argued Walker has failed the state, not looked out for the middle class, and is focused on running for president in two years.

Burke is a former Trek Bicycles executive and state Commerce Department secretary running in her first statewide race.

Walker has said he deserves a second term after cutting taxes by about \$2 billion and overseeing the addition of more than 110,000 new jobs.

Burke has said Wisconsin can do better and she wants to undo much of what Walker passed.

In addition, two county prosecutors were squaring off to become Wisconsin's next attorney general.

Waukesha County District Attorney Brad Schimel and Jefferson County District Attorney Susan Happ were vying to replace outgoing Republican Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen.

The race between the Republican Schimel and Democratic Happ became increasingly bitter as Election Day approached, with each candidate having accused the other of being soft on crime.

Schimel also tried to brand Happ as a liberal activist who wants to use the position to advance a partisan agenda. Happ called Schimel a robot who will blindly defend any Republican law regardless of its constitutionality.

Voters also were choosing a state treasurer and secretary of state, two largely powerless offices in which the key issue this campaign has been whether they should even exist.

Republican Matt Adamczyk has promised to work to eliminate the treasurer's office if elected to it. Adamczyk has said it makes no sense to pay an officeholder \$68,000 to fulfill one task — serving on the board of commissioners of public lands, which makes loans to schools and municipalities.

His opponent, Democrat David Sartori, has promised to work to regain the office's previous responsibilities, including disposing of unclaimed property.

The third-party hopefuls are Constitution Party candidate Andrew Zuelke, Wisconsin Green Party candidate Ron Hardy and Libertarian Jerry Shidell.

Democratic Secretary of State Doug La Follette was facing a challenge by Republican Julian Bradley, a telecommunications manager who has said the office needs new energy after being occupied by La Follette for most of the past four decades.

Constitution Party candidate Jerry Broitzman and Libertarian Andy Craig also were on the ballot.

For House of Representatives, Republican U.S. Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner represents District 5, which covers all of Jefferson County. The longtime congressman was being opposed by Democratic candidate Chris Rockwood.

At the state level, residents of the towns of Albion, Center, Cold Spring, Dunkirk, Edgerton, Footville, Fulton, the Town of Janesville, a part of the Town of Koshkonong, Lima, Milton, part of Oregon, Plymouth, Porter, Rutland, Sumner and Whitewater in Dane, Rock, Walworth and Jefferson counties were to be casting ballots in Assembly District 43.

Incumbent state Rep. Andy Jorgensen, D-Milton, was being challenged on the Nov. 4 ballot by Republican Leon Hebert of the Town of Koshkonong.

Democrat Mary Arnold, of Columbus, was challenging incumbent Rep. John Jagler, R-Watertown, for his 37th District Assembly seat, which covers the communities of Waterloo, Watertown and the Town of Ixonia in Jefferson County, as well as parts of Columbia, Dane and Dodge counties.

In Assembly District 38, Democrat Tom Chojnacki of Lake Mills was trying to unseat five-term incumbent Rep. Joel Kleefisch, R-Oconomowoc.

The 38th District includes the towns of Medina, Deerfield, Christiana, Lake Mills, Waterloo, Milford, Aztalan, Farmington, Watertown, Concord, Summit, Oconomowoc Lake and Lac LaBelle across Dane, Jefferson and Waukesha counties.

Cody Horlacher, 27, of Mukwonago, won a three-way race in the August Republican primary to fill the state Assembly District 33 seat. There is no Democrat on the ballot.

In Jefferson County, District 33 covers the cities of Fort Atkinson and Jefferson; the Towns of Hebron, Jefferson, Oakland, Palmyra, Sullivan and a portion of the Town of Koshkonong, and the Villages of Palmyra and Sullivan. Outside of Jefferson the district extends into the Waukesha County towns of Eagle and Mukwonago, and into the Walworth County towns of LaGrange and Troy to the south.

Three state Senate races were also on the ballot in Jefferson County today.

Senate Majority Leader Sen. Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, was being challenged for his District 13 Senate seat in the Nov. 4 election. He was facing newcomer Michelle Zahn, also of Juneau.

Senate District 13 includes Assembly Districts 37, 38 and 39, encompassing portions of Jefferson, Dane, Dodge, Washington and Waukesha counties.

State Rep. Stephen Nass, R-LaGrange, was vying for the 11th Senate District Seat vacated by Sen. Neal Kedzie in June. He was being challenged by Democrat Dan Kilkenny of Delavan.

Encompassing Assembly Districts 31, 32 and 33, the 11th Senate District covers most of Walworth County, and portions of Rock, Jefferson, Waukesha and Kenosha counties.

Janesville City Council member Brian Fitzgerald and state Rep. Janis Ringhand were squaring off in today's election, each hoping to win the seat vacated by District 15 Sen. Tim Cullen.

District 15 encompasses portions of Dane, Jefferson, Rock, Green and Walworth counties.

Two Jefferson County elected officials were on the ballot unopposed: Republican Sheriff Paul Milbrath and Republican Clerk of Courts Carla Robinson.

Several referendums were on the ballot today as well.

Wisconsin had one statewide ballot question this year, asking voters whether the state constitution should be amended to keep the state transportation fund from being siphoned for other purposes.

Lawmakers proposed the amendment after the Legislature transferred \$1.4 billion from the state transportation fund between 2003 and 2011 to pay for schools and other expenses. The amendment would ensure that money collected from driver's license, vehicle plate and other fees is used for road maintenance and construction.

Also on the ballot was a Jefferson County advisory referendum asking whether the state of Wisconsin should accept federal Medicaid funds for residents up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level.

Gov. Scott Walker declined federal funding to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), often called "Obamacare."

The ACA allows states to expand their Medicaid programs to cover people earning up to 133 percent of the poverty level. Gov. Walker chose an alternative route to expand Medicaid, expanding it for residents only earning 100 percent of the poverty level.

The referendum question reads: "Shall the State of Wisconsin accept available federal Medicaid funds to provide access to BadgerCare to Wisconsin residents up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level?"

Jefferson County is one of 19 counties holding referendums on the Medicaid question.

The Whitewater Unified School District School Board was seeking authorization to exceed state-imposed revenue caps for the 2015-19 school years.

The referendum question, as it will appear on the ballot, reads: "Shall the Whitewater Unified School District, Jefferson, Rock and Walworth Counties, Wisconsin, be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by \$1.2 million a year beginning with the 2015-16 school year through the 2018-19 school year, for non-recurring purposes consisting of the following objectives: maintaining elementary class sizes, student support services, comprehensive instructional programs, co-curricular programs, technology infrastructure and facilities maintenance?"

Voters in the WUSD have approved similar referenda in the past.

Three townships were facing individual referenda next Tuesday, as well.

The Town of Ixonia was seeking permission to exceed the tax levy limit on an ongoing basis to cover road repairs. Currently, state law allows the levy to go up only 1.88 percent, which for the 2015 fiscal year amounts to \$905,748.

The referendum asks permission to raise the levy for the next fiscal year 2015 by a total 55.2 percent, resulting in a levy of \$1,405,748.

A "yes" vote supports the town increasing the levy to \$1,405,748. In addition, it authorizes the board to increase

the levy on an ongoing basis. A “no” vote keeps the levy at the \$905,748.

Meanwhile, residents of both the towns of Palmyra and Sullivan were being asked whether the clerk and/or treasurer positions should be appointed by the board of supervisors rather than elected. Per Wisconsin statutes, the combined office of town clerk and town treasurer can be filled by appointment of a majority of the members-elect of a town board.

Term of the office may not exceed three years but the board may reappoint the officer for additional terms. According to statutes, the board only may remove the officer during a given term for “cause.”

A “yes” means the treasurer and town clerk no longer would be elected positions. “No” votes in either town would leave the positions on the ballot.