

# 7th CD clerks say election running smoothly, in-person turnout mixed

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City clerks in northern Wisconsin's sprawling 7th CD say today's special election so far is running smoothly.

State Sen. Tom Tiffany, R-Minocqua, faces Dem opponent and Wausau School Board President Tricia Zunker in today's election.

Some clerks in the sampling of municipalities WisPolitics.com spoke with reported low in-person turnout, while others said more people have shown up today than for the April 7 spring election. But all said they thought local weather played a factor.

"Things have been going great here and I expect it to continue to the end of the day," said Denise Oliphant, Ashland city clerk. "We're seeing a lot of interest today at this vote. We're just glad we have such a beautiful day."

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Oliphant told WisPolitics.com the National Guard offered to help run the polls and count votes, but her office found enough volunteers that the Guard wasn't needed.

She said the city has received absentee ballots from about a quarter of its registered voters, but walk-ins are also turning out slightly higher than she expected.

Eagle River City Clerk Debra Brown said her staff has mostly been busy processing absentee ballots while in-person voters remain "very light."

"Last election we had about one-third of our voters were walk-ins, but this time it seems to be very low," Brown said. "I don't know if it's going to get better. It was pretty cold last night."

Meanwhile in Rhinelander, City Clerk Valerie Foley told WisPolitics.com they've received over 1,400 absentee ballots, more than the 1,362 for April 7, but in-person turnout is still flowing.

"It must mean people must feel comfortable enough to get out to exercise their right to vote," she said. "By the amount of absentee ballots, I didn't expect anything at all, but apparently there's more out there."

Foley called today's special election between Zunker and Tiffany, "a pretty simple ballot" where not a lot can go wrong and the polls can be "running as usual."

For protective measures, Foley said each poll worker wears a mask and there are plexiglass dividers between them and voters. Volunteers then wipe down voting machines with sanitizer after every use, and there are taped markings on the floor of each station to indicate appropriate social distancing measures.

"We're hoping we have enough protective measures in place and we believe we do," she said. "We try to keep everything as sanitary as we possibly can."

The Wisconsin National Guard activated approximately 160 service members to support the election.

Clad in civilian clothing while serving their home counties, the Guard members will be "just like any other poll worker," said Maj. Gen. Paul Knapp, Wisconsin's adjutant general.

Members have been properly trained and are to observe the physical distancing guidelines established at each polling site, he said. Their duties include everything from working the polls to cleanup to assisting with sanitizing.

"When they get there, they're kind of like all other volunteers at a polling site as your neighbors out there in the counties and they're doing basically whatever the clerk needs them to do to make the election successful," said Knapp.

\*See related coverage, including photos from the polls: <https://apnews.com/-b50f7a9cddfda42492f749e0930d729>

\*May 13 update: See an item, including photos, from the Department of Military Affairs about the National Guard effort: <https://dma.wi.gov/DMA/news/2020news/20082>