

Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin National Guard provides support during November election

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More than 300 Wisconsin National Guard Citizen Soldiers and Airmen completed their mission supporting communities throughout the state, serving as poll workers for the November 3 election.

Approximately 150 additional Guard members mobilized in a reserve status to be available, if needed, to fill last-minute poll worker shortages.

The Guard members, unarmed and dressed in civilian attire, were called to state active duty Nov. 1 and received general election volunteer training prior to serving at polling stations. All had concluded their missions and been released from their duties as poll workers by 4:30 a.m. Wednesday morning following the election. The state called on the Guard to assist at the polls due to a critical shortage of poll workers in the state stemming from concerns over COVID-19.

“It was so important for Guard members to support this mission in the absence of people who normally would serve as poll workers to ensure our communities could open all of our polling stations throughout the State and ensure a safe and sanitary place for our citizens to exercise their right to vote,” said Brig. Gen. Robyn Blader, the assistant adjutant general for readiness and training, who is the Wisconsin National Guard’s liaison with the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

The Wisconsin National Guard provided support to 94 polling locations in 53 Wisconsin counties. In accordance with state elections laws, the National Guard members generally served as poll workers in the counties in which they reside. They fulfilled the same roles and duties that a traditional civilian poll worker fulfills,

and in most cases served alongside fellow civilian poll workers in communities across the state.

This mission was similar to the Wisconsin National Guard's role during the last three elections in Wisconsin, though it was unique in the aspect that the Wisconsin Air National Guard took the lead in support efforts, while the Army National Guard served in a support role. This mission marked the first time that the Wisconsin Air National Guard had the lead for command and control of a domestic support mission in Wisconsin.

Lt. Col. Jason Crabb, commander of the 115th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, served as the joint task force officer in charge, providing mission command for the November 2020 Election Support Operation. In this role he worked closely with interagency partners and Wisconsin National Guard commanders to ensure everything ran smoothly on election day.

"It has been extremely gratifying to work with the Wisconsin Elections Commission and counties throughout the state to provide a coordinated, effective response to support polling locations," Crabb said.

"I am continuously impressed by the professionalism and dedication of our interagency partners;

I see in them the same spirit of service-before-self that animates the Soldiers and Airmen in our formations," he added.

Lt. Col. Julie Eddy, a bioenvironmental engineer with the 115th Fighter Wing, assisted at a polling station in Appleton. She said she was thankful for the opportunity to help and be a part of the process.

"Observing the other poll workers, I am truly impressed by the level of meticulousness and dedication making sure all ballots are counted and processes followed," Eddy said.

She added that she was happy to learn something new.

"I joined the Guard to be able to help when assistance is needed and I am happy to do so, especially with something so important," Eddy said.

Tech. Sgt. Brian Strube, an Airman with the 115th Fighter Wing, ran one of the

polling machines in the Village of Neshkoro, Wis., in Marquette County. He said he was able to bring a few smiles to faces as voters submitted their ballots.

“It was wonderful to help so many people and a community to exercise the right as Americans to vote,” Strube said. “I am honored to have been able to help.”

The Wisconsin National Guard also worked in collaboration with the Civil Air Patrol and the Wisconsin Elections Commission in recent weeks to ship supplies of hand sanitizer, wipes, spray bottles, and personal protective equipment to each county to help ensure safe and sanitary polling sites.

The Wisconsin National Guard has played a key role in Wisconsin’s last three elections. During the state’s general election April 7, more than 2,400 Wisconsin Guard members mobilized in the same role and supported 71 of Wisconsin’s 72 counties. During the May 11 special election in the state’s 7th Congressional District, another 160 served as poll workers, and during the August 12 state primary, nearly 700 Guard members fulfilled the same role.

“I am extremely proud of our Citizen Soldiers and Airman who continue to answer the call time and time again and did once again during our 4th election this year,” Blader said.

“They successfully executed every polling mission with unmatched professionalism”