

Mayor Rhodes-Conway: Statement regarding April 7 Election

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Today, against all public health guidance and common sense, Wisconsin was forced to open the polls and hold an election in the midst of a pandemic. Wisconsin was the only state in the nation to go forward with an in-person election the same week that federal officials were warning of 'Pearl Harbor' levels of death and illness. The results of this action – in both voter disenfranchisement and public health – will become more apparent in the coming days, but this much is clear right now: holding this election today was a travesty.

Wisconsin Republicans have perfected the art of voter suppression with dozens of new laws and restrictions spanning a decade. Their extreme voter ID law passed under Scott Walker became a huge burden for the elderly and the sick who attempted to send identification over the internet to accompany their absentee ballots. Madison alone received over 1,400 absentee requests that were missing photos of valid IDs, and fielded hundreds of phone calls from people struggling with the online system.

Alaska, Georgia, Indiana, Maryland, West Virginia, and Ohio, all with Republican leadership, have all postponed primaries or altered election rules to protect voters. Only the Wisconsin GOP chose to push forward at the height of the pandemic. Wisconsin Republicans put their political agenda above the health and safety of the people of Wisconsin in a shameful display of rank partisanship. This radical move to disenfranchise voters is the most extreme in the nation.

Everyone should pay attention to what has happened in Wisconsin and make sure that this outrageous abuse does not become standard practice come November. Photos and videos show long lines of people and large gatherings at polling locations around the state. Vulnerable and fearful voters, who tried to vote

absentee and were given a grace period to get in the ballots by a federal court judge last week, were forced to change plans and rush to the polls because their absentee ballots didn't arrive on time this week.

While we await the final numbers, we're hearing reports that voter turnout seems low today. This isn't surprising given that news articles from mid-day yesterday said that elections were postponed today. And while absentee ballots may make up for low in-person turnout, it remains to be seen how many will be postmarked under the new deadline given by the U.S. Supreme Court less than 24 hours ago. As of this morning, around 22,000 absentee ballots had not yet been returned.

My deepest gratitude goes out to our flexible and fast moving City staff, our remarkable City Clerk Maribeth Witzel-Behl, and the countless poll workers who stepped up to get the job done today. We were able to staff 66 poll locations and were able to avoid the long lines and the crowds that many places in Wisconsin experienced. The people who made this possible are truly heroes, and it's no exaggeration to say that they may have saved lives today through their efforts.