

‘UpFront’: Knudson criticizes how Milwaukee, Green Bay handled voting; Subeck calls election ‘absolute debacle’

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A top state elections official criticized two Wisconsin cities for the way they carried out voting last Tuesday.

“We saw clerks handle it well, and we saw clerks handle it poorly in Milwaukee and Green Bay,” said Dean Knudson, the Republican chairman of the Wisconsin Elections Commission. He appeared Sunday on “UpFront,” produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com.

“They have the right to make local decisions, but it’s really too bad. In Green Bay, they turned down volunteer poll workers, they turned down the National Guard, they made some poor choices,” Knudson said.

Both cities drastically reduced their number of polling sites, citing a lack of poll workers available to run the sites during the pandemic. That resulted in long lines and voters waiting hours to cast their ballots.

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Knudson said there were several lessons learned last week, including that last-minute court rulings “cause confusion,” and “there are problems with the mail.”

Many voters said they requested absentee ballots that never arrived in the mail.

Knudson said mail-in voting could be increased, and the state should look at giving clerks help for that, including more funding for postage and envelopes. But he said

it would not eliminate the need for in-person voting on election day.

“Even states like Washington state that are primarily vote-by-mail still have in-person voting,” he said.

If a majority of ballots were mailed in, then “in-person becomes a lot easier to manage and handle,” Knudson said.

Overall, he said the election ran smoothly on Tuesday, with the exception of the polling places in Green Bay and Milwaukee.

“We can do this again,” Knudson said. “We’ll be applying all the same principles and procedures again. And each time we’ll learn from it.”

But an Assembly Democrat called Tuesday’s election “an absolute debacle.”

Rep. Lisa Subeck of Madison said she heard from constituents who were afraid to get out and vote because of the pandemic, or who were disenfranchised because they didn’t get their absentee ballot in the mail, or couldn’t get a witness signature due to the stay-at-home order.

“I think the biggest shame of it all is that we risked the lives of countless Wisconsinites, I mean tens of thousands of people who potentially have been exposed as we worked so hard to bend the curve on COVID-19, and as we worked so hard to control its spread and to slow it. I think Tuesday may very well have set us back in ways that we cannot even imagine, and that’s horrifying,” Subeck said.

Subeck is supporting a Democratic bill to move the remainder of Wisconsin’s 2020 elections to all mail-in balloting.

“If we act now and we act quickly, if we take legislative action now to make this change, we have a lot of time to plan for it,” she said.

Subeck cited Oregon’s success with all mail-in voting.

“It works there, and it can work for us,” she said.

Also on the program, Missy Hughes, secretary and CEO of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, discussed the toll the coronavirus shutdown is taking on small businesses, and the help available to them.

“What we’ve essentially seen is a tidal wave come across the state, hitting our businesses,” she said.

She said the WEDC is trying to find “innovative, creative ways to make sure that we support them and get them through this crisis.”

See more from the program:

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