

Balanced Election Calendar

A Proposal for Changing Wisconsin's Election Calendar

2010 may be the last year Wisconsin has the partisan primary in September, due to recent federal legislation. The MOVE act may require an earlier primary in future years. Some states have responded by moving their primary to August, but August is a challenging month for engaging voters. Details of the MOVE act are on the Government Accountability Board website.

Let's take a fresh look at the entire calendar. The proposed Balanced Elections Calendar (BEC) has two elections most years, which would keep the non-partisan elections separate from the partisan elections, allow flexibility in scheduling the partisan primary and the presidential primary, and result in elections that are more cost-effective.

Summary of the current schedule: Non-partisan elections (many local offices, judges, supreme court and state superintendent of public schools) are held each year in February and April. Partisan elections are in September and November of even numbered years. This schedule has four elections every other year.

Summary of proposed changes: Non-partisan elections would be kept in the spring, but held only every other year, in the year when there are no partisan elections. This opens the calendar in even number years, so that the partisan primary and presidential primary can be scheduled at the best time.

Features of the Balanced Election Calendar

- **Provides several choices for moving the September primary, so there is a sufficient gap between the primary and general election.** The current time gap is too short to meet the new requirement to send a ballot to military and overseas voters at least 45 days before a November election.
- **Maintains separation of partisan and non-partisan elections.** (Article VII, section 9 of the Wisconsin Constitution states "There shall be no election for a justice or judge at the partisan general election for state or county officers, nor within 30 days either before or after such election.")
- **Groups more non-partisan elections together,** which may improve interest and participation. For instance, one election cycle could feature a mayoral contest, and the next non-partisan election cycle (two years later) could feature the County Executive contest. Each cycle would have a high profile contest.

- **Saves money** due to fewer elections in a four-year cycle. This proposal will have nine elections in four years, instead of the current schedule of twelve elections in four years.
- **Moves the February election two weeks later to reduce the possibility of snow on Election Day.**
- **Allows optimum scheduling of the presidential primary**, independent of the existing non-partisan spring elections. Future February presidential primaries may be discouraged by party rule, and April primaries are often deemed too late.
<http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/113163-new-presidential-primary-rules-will-alter-2012-contest>
- **Balances the workload** for election administrators, as each year would only have two elections, except the presidential primary year would have three.

Complications of the Balanced Election Calendar

- Some non-partisan elections would include two seats on the Supreme Court. (This would require amending article VII, section 4 of the Wisconsin constitution, which states, "Only one justice may be elected in any year.")
- The term of existing local non-partisan officeholders would need to be changed leading up to the first new cycle. The existing terms could be adjusted by adding or subtracting a year, but this would require a Constitutional amendment. As an alternative, counties, school boards, and municipalities could be given the option of continuing to have spring elections every year.
- Some local offices are currently elected for three-year terms. This could be changed to two or four years, or the local jurisdiction could be given the option of continuing to have spring elections every year.
- The non-partisan elections would have more offices on the ballot. This could be a spur for more voter participation in the election, or it could make it more difficult for voters to evaluate candidates. In the past, many candidates have been unopposed, minimizing this effect.
- Under the existing system the longest time between elections is ten months. Under the proposed system, the longest time could be up to 14 months, depending upon the date for the partisan primary. This gap might result in calling special elections to fill vacancies or for referendums.

Existing Calendar – 12 elections in 4 years

Year	February	April	September	November
2012	Presidential primary and non-partisan primary*	Non-partisan spring election	Partisan primary	General election: President plus other partisan offices
2013	Non-partisan primary	Non-partisan spring election		
2014	Non-partisan primary	Non-partisan spring election	Partisan primary	General election: Governor, Lt. Gov, AG, Sec State, Treasurer, plus other partisan offices
2015	Non-partisan primary	Non-partisan spring election		

*Presidential primary is the only election which mixes partisan and non-partisan contests.

Proposed Balanced Election Calendar – 9 elections in 4 years

Year	Early March	Late April	Choose any month: May to August	November
2012	Presidential primary		Partisan primary	General election: President plus other partisan offices
2013	Non-partisan primary	Non-partisan spring election		
2014			Partisan primary	General election: Governor, Lt. Gov, AG, Sec. State, Treasurer, plus other partisan offices
2015	Non-partisan primary	Non-partisan spring election		

Both the existing schedule and the Balanced Election Calendar keep the non-partisan elections separate from the partisan elections.

Non-partisan elections include supreme court, state superintendent of schools, judges, school board, county board & exec, alders & mayor.

Partisan elections include congress, state senate & assembly, DA, county clerk, coroner, sheriff, register of deeds, clerk of court, treasurer