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**Marijuana, election administration, abortion, levy increases among ballot questions before voters**

Wisconsin communities will take up questions about legalizing marijuana, election administration, clean water, abortion, and local levy increases on the November ballot.

The ballot questions include 23 requests for tax levy increases, including to fund emergency services and law enforcement.

Jerry Deschane, executive director of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, urged action to address a lack of funding for emergency medical services, firefighters and police.

“These life-threatening impacts brought on by a broken funding system must be addressed soon. We are committed to working with our state and local partners, and we look forward to finding a meaningful path forward to fix this broken system that has been neglected for too long,” Deschane said in a statement following regional meetings across the state with local leaders.

Some of the largest increases for emergency services and law enforcement include:

- $2.3 million increase in the fiscal year 2023 and a $3.6 million increase each year after that in Washington County to fund the Washington County Anti-Crime Plan, which would increase staffing across a variety of areas including patrol staff and for jail operations;

- $1.4 million increase in the city of Eau Claire to hire six firefighters-paramedics, six police officers, two civilian community service officers, and a law enforcement associate to support 911 dispatchers;

- $1.2 million increase in the city of Chippewa Falls to boost wages for police and fire and emergency services employees and to hire additional personnel;

- $1.1 million increase in the city of Whitewater to establish, staff and operate a Whitewater Municipal Government Fire and Emergency Services department; and

- $958,000 increase in the town of Grand Chute to hire five additional police officers, increase hours for support staff, and pay for training, equipment and vehicles.

Voters will also take up questions about election administration, including about the use of private funds in elections.

Identical referendums in Lincoln, Brown and Price counties ask voters if the state should prohibit election officials from using “private funds, technology, or services from special interest groups, people, or other private entities” to administer elections and referendums.

Some 200 Wisconsin communities received aid ahead of the 2020 presidential election from the Center for Tech and Civic Life, funded largely by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. Most of the money -- $8.8 million -- went to five cities: Green Bay, Kenosha, Madison, Milwaukee and Racine. Some Republicans have argued the money favored Democrats.

A referendum in Waukesha County asks if the Legislature should put forth a constitutional amendment to prohibit “non-governmental entities and any individual other than election officials designated by law from funding, managing, or performing any task in election administration.”

Some other election-related referendums include:

- Identical referendums in Waukesha County and Washington County on whether the Legislature should put forth a constitutional amendment to require election administration, ballot access and ballot counting to be “nearly uniform as practicable.”

- A Wood County referendum asking if the Legislature should create a law allowing for “direct ballot initiatives for statewide legislation.”

Referendums in the city of Racine and Dane County address the state’s 1849 abortion ban, asking voters: “Should Wisconsin Statutes section 940.04, which bans abortion at any stage of pregnancy without exception for rape, incest, or the health of the patient, be repealed to ensure legal access to abortion care?”

The only exception under the current ban is to save the life of the mother. A Sept. 14 Marquette Law School poll of registered Wisconsin voters found 83 percent of respondents said the law should allow abortions in cases of rape or incest.

Voters in Adams, Bayfield, Green, Juneau and Outagamie counties will weigh countywide referendums on clean water. The referendums are part of a Clean Water Now for Wisconsin campaign led by local leaders and supported by the non-profit River Alliance of Wisconsin, according to the effort’s website.

The question asks voters: “Should the state of Wisconsin establish a right to clean water to protect human health, the environment, and the diverse cultural and natural heritage of Wisconsin?”

Voters in Eau Claire and La Crosse counties approved the question in the spring election this year.

Marijuana legalization is also on the ballot in three counties and five municipalities.

Dane, Milwaukee and Eau Claire counties are asking voters if they want marijuana legalized for those aged 21 and up. The question in all three counties also asks if voters want to regulate the drug the same way alcohol is regulated. Milwaukee and Eau Claire ask if voters also want to tax marijuana sales.

Dane County is the only one to ask voters if they want all previous possession convictions for small amounts of marijuana expunged.

The cities of Superior, Stevens Point, Racine, Appleton and Kenosha are asking voters if they want to legalize, tax and regulate marijuana for adult use in the same way alcohol is taxed, regulated and legal for adults.

Senate Minority Leader Janet Bewley, D-Mason, last year at a Wisconsin Counties Association event said she could see the state legalizing marijuana at some point in the future. She previously said she didn’t believe Wisconsinites had an appetite for legalization.

Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, has repeatedly said he doesn’t believe Wisconsin should legalize marijuana because it’s still illegal under federal law.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, has expressed support for medical marijuana.

The referendums also include 82 questions across 41 counties on whether to change town clerk, town treasurer, and town clerk/treasurer positions from elected to appointed positions. A WisPolitics.com review of fall election referendums in 2020 found that towns were seeking to make the change to appointed positions due to a lack of interested and qualified candidates in rural areas.

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