**Down-ballot races, referendums could stoke April election turnout**

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The Supreme Court race between Appeals Court Judges Brian Hagedorn and Lisa Neubauer headlines the upcoming April 2 election, but several measures down ballot could spark interest and juice turnout.

Mayoral races in some of the state’s largest cities have the potential to draw voters to the polls. In Democrat-dominated Madison, incumbent Democratic Mayor Paul Soglin will face off against Satya Rhodes-Conway, a board member of the Democratic Party of Dane County and a former three-term Madison city alder. Democratic operatives say that race should help Neubauer.

Green Bay will also play host to a mayoral election, where former Democratic state Rep. Eric Genrich will face off against Patrick Buckley, a Brown County supervisor. Genrich won 44 percent of the primary vote, compared to just 18 percent for Buckley, who is backed by the Brown County Republican Party.

In Oshkosh, incumbent Mayor Steve Cummings and Deputy Mayor Lori Palmeri square off after narrowly splitting the primary, winning 39.6 percent and 39.3 percent of the vote, respectively.

Meanwhile, 26 school districts across the state will seek authorization to expand general obligation bonding by over $1 billion for construction projects.

The largest bonding referendum comes from Sun Prairie Area School District, which is asking to borrow up to $164 million for a multi-phase project to: build a new high school; improve secondary schools; rebuild Ashley Field as a district-wide athletic and multi-use facility; remove several buildings; and purchase equipment. The school district will ask voters to exceed its revenue limit by $5 million per year.

The remaining 25 school districts are asking to borrow between $2 million and $129.5 million for building projects ranging from an elementary school to a track and field complex. The districts with the largest bonding referendums are: Winnebago County’s Neenah Joint School District; Dane County’s DeForest Area School District; Fond Du Lac County’s Fond du Lac School District, which will have two bonding referendums; Milwaukee County’s Shorewood School District; and Rock County’s Milton School District.

A handful of school districts statewide will also have referendums on the ballot asking their voters to approve measures exceeding revenue limits. Revenue limits are calculated by dividing the amount of state aid received in the previous school year and property taxes levied for the previous school year by the average of the number of students in the three previous school years.

A total of 26 school districts have requested to exceed their limit by a total of more than $179.5 million over a 10-year period. The school districts asking to exceed the revenue limit by the largest amount are: Kettle Moraine School District, with a ballot measure in Waukesha County asking to exceed the revenue limit by roughly $6 million per year for six years; New Berlin School District, also located in Waukesha County, with an ask of $5 million per year for five years; and Palmyra-Eagle Area School District in Jefferson County, asking to exceed revenue limits by a total of $11.5 million in increasing increments over a four-year period. A vast majority of the requests to exceed revenue limits, including the three largest, would kick in during the 2019-20 school year if approved.

Six school districts will also ask voters to approve exceeding the revenue limit by an additional $11.9 million per year on a recurring basis.

The largest chunk of that figure comes from school districts in Dane County, with the Sun Prairie Area School District’s $5 million request to exceed their revenue limit clocking in as the largest by far. DeForest Area School District and Marshall School District have the next largest request. The two districts will ask voters to approve exceeding their revenue limits by $2.5 million and $1.25 million, dropping $875,000 after two years, respectively.

Additionally, several local referendums could play a factor in turnout.

* Wood County will have two questions about marijuana on the ballot. One will ask voters if medical marijuana should be legalized, while the second asks if marijuana should be legalized for recreational purposes and taxed and regulated like alcohol.
* The Village of Egg Harbor in Door County will also ask voters about these two issues.
* Vernon County and La Crosse County, meanwhile, will ask voters to weigh in on redistricting. Both counties will ask if a nonpartisan procedure should be implemented to draw legislative and congressional maps.
* The Town of Newbold in Oneida County will also ask voters about redistricting.

Cities and towns across the state will also have referendums on the ballot on a variety of topics, with questions ranging from whether ATV’s should be allowed to drive on roads to the organization of municipal government.

Sheboygan will also have a referendum on the ballot asking voters to weigh in on the so-called “dark stores loophole,” which allows large retailers to claim their buildings should be taxed at the same rate as closed, or “dark,” stores.

In November, voters in more than 20 counties, cities and villages across the state-backed referendums urging lawmakers to pass legislation to change the provision.

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