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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** Their most senior member Here is the Honorable Tim Petri. Some of you may remember him as Tom Petri or Thomas Petri, because that's what he was elected as. But we found out that he prefers Tim has always been Tim. So it's kind of like if you knew him as Tim, you knew you were on the cool ones in the group. So I'm fortunate enough to finally met him as Tim. Before that, he was always Thomas to me, but he served from 1979 to 2015. So a long career in Wisconsin sixth Congressional District, which is over on the eastern side of the state, so opposite of where we are here today, but a critical group. And prior to serving in Congress, he was also in the Wisconsin state Senate. Served his time there. Good evening. Fire is the lacrosse county clerk. Since 2011. She has served in that capacity for 14 years. Before that was a deputy county clerk. So she has a lot of experience. She is one of those that we have reached out to from PBS, Wisconsin. When we want to hear from experts in the field about what is going on. And we have utilized her in the past to educate our viewers. And as I told her tonight, we will probably be doing that again in the future of reaching out to utilize her expertise. She was also recognized the Wisconsin constitutional officer of the year. That is an impressive title. So when we open this program and refer to her as the expert on a lot of these topics, we do that with all sincerity, not just because she is the only clerk on this stage and can answer the technical questions. Also, the honorable Reed Ribble, Republican, he was also served with the eighth Congressional, which is the Green Bay area. So Lambeau Field is part of his home districts. I'm sure he was proud to brag to everyone that he met in Congress. Served from 2011 to 2017. Prior to that, he was in the roofing industry and had a very successful business career as one of those people that went from the private sector into serving in Congress and took those skills that he utilized. So we have a different range of experiences which in the best of ways is what we would want to rely on as a democracy, is people bringing their personal experiences to Congress to utilize them to the best of their abilities. He retired in 2017 and is very happily serving also as a former member of Congress, but also motorcycling and enjoying travel. So kudos to him for that. And finally, a face that some of you may recognize, and that is the honorable Ron kind. He served in the third Congressional, which is seated here in La Crosse just a couple of years ago, last off, left office, but he served from 1997 to 2023. La Crosse native, also served as a prosecutor before that. So he long time service in government. So these are your panelists. Thank you very much for being here. And let's give them a round of applause for their service. All right. So we are going to start with you, Jenny, because I want to lay the groundwork here for what hopefully this this evening can bring us in terms of discussion. Let's talk about election security and election administration, because for most of us, our main interaction comes when we go to the polls and we think it is a one day thing. And the shorter the line, the better for most of us to get in, get out and then watch the results that night. Can you give us a little bit of background on the year round job, the continual job that this is and also in this time of year, in this time of election season, what it means when the US Supreme Court says they're about to make a decision or they're going to take a case or someone asks for an appeal on whether this person or that person is going to be on the ballot. So give us a little background about your job and how much goes into it.

[00:03:34] **Speaker 2** Yeah, Contrary to popular belief, election is in just one day. We've been working on the November election even before we had the August ballot, The August election. So, you know, it's it's a multi month process that takes a long time with coding the elections, finding out who's on the ballot. Sometimes we don't find out who's on the ballot until after we've printed ballots. But that's one of those things with the Supreme Court decisions that come down. You know, we call the elections. We get the ballots printed, we get them to the municipal clerks, and then they start the process of the absentee ballots being mailed out to those who have a request on file. And that happens 47 days before the election so we can meet the federal deadline of two weeks before the election. We go to in-person absentee voting where people can go into the clerk's office and cast their ballot before Election Day. That gets extremely busy. We expect that to be extremely busy for this presidential. And then, you know, that leads up to Election Day. In that timeframe, we're also training our poll workers are municipal clerks. We want to make sure they're ready. Laws change a lot. Sometimes we do our training and say, remember what I taught you last time? Just disregard that. Let's talk about what the law is now. So, you know, we're going to do that training and we make sure our poll workers know what the current processes are, what the current laws are for. Make sure our municipal clerks are up to date on that. And, you know, we're going to be ready to go here in the county and we'll have a successful election, will be safe, secure. And that's what we expect here.

[00:04:54] **Speaker 1** So we have seen a shift over the last four years, certainly, and perhaps even prior to that in terms of the attention paid to clerks and the important work you do, but also a lot of conspiracies surrounding the work that you do. And unfortunately, coming with that is some threats that come in from people that don't know better where to channel their anger, their frustration, their questions and want to impugn your reputation. What have you seen here and what do you have to work with for your employees and all the volunteers that come in on Election Day in terms of them preparing them for a very potentially dangerous election season?

[00:05:33] **Speaker 2** Yeah, it's unfortunate that in our training now that we teach de-escalation skills, we you know, when you get mail on your desk in the morning, you should stop and think like, what if white powder is going to fall out of this? Because that happened in other states. And, you know, we're teaching our clerks, you know, be prepared, be safe. You know, we have contingency plans in place. If there's certain threats at the polling place, what are you going to do? Or, you know, the de-escalation we're doing in training? You know, how do we get voters that are excited about certain things? How do we get them out? You know, we've lost a lot of poll workers over the years because of those threats. And and sometimes it's just voters that come to the polls that don't like having to show their I.D. or they don't like having to sign the poll book. Well, the poll worker isn't the person who made those laws. They're just here to enforce them. We're here to to make sure you exercise your right to be able to cast a ballot. But the frustration is taken out on those poll workers and a lot of those poll workers just you know, they got scared away from it. And we're having to bring in new poll workers and get them trained in because those senior poll workers, you know, just aren't there anymore for what we need. So it's definitely a different environment where we were five years ago or ten years ago when I first started this job. But it's part of it. We have amazing municipal clerks. We have amazing poll workers that are all taking it in in stride as we go. And we're going through it. And, you know, we're going to get through it and still have have our elections.

[00:06:54] **Speaker 1** If you can share your mike with Tim Timmerman, address this question to you, As our most seasoned statesman here, you have had the longest career in politics. What has changed over your time? And give us some perspective in terms of how it used to be and when did you notice a shift and what does that mean in the bigger picture for our democracy?

[00:07:16] **Speaker 3** Well, I think actually people took the elections pretty much for granted. And and it was part of your civic obligation to vote. It was part of your civic obligation. If you have the time to volunteer and work at the polls, I suspect there are people in this room who have friends or who me themselves at one time or another volunteered and then poll workers, people. It's a it's an important job and it's done by our fellow citizens. It's. A self-governing country. And for a variety of reasons, over the years that I've been in office, the system has become quite a bit more more formal and legalistic. It used to be a little bit more relaxed. And and if your nomination papers weren't exactly right, people said, Well, you've made an effort and we'll put you on the ballot. And sort of that sort of thing was the attitude when I first was running. Now, like, you go to court and if the lawyers are involved and it's become much more sort of formalistic and so on. And, you know, I suppose that's all right, but it's a little overdoing it because it is self government and no one knows because it's never going to be perfect. But people are doing the best they can. And I certainly think here in Wisconsin, lacrosse and unlike my hometown, an awful lot of people are conducting the elections and doing a very good job.

[00:08:43] **Speaker 1** I do want to add for everyone out here, we do hope to take some questions at the end if you're able. And one of the cards on your seat has a QR code. You can scan it into your phone and then type in a question that will pop up on an app on my phone. And so I'll be able to read it that way. It's a little more efficient for us to tell it that way rather than trying to pass a mike around. So if you do have a question when we get to that portion or if you want to scan it in right now, feel free. So, Ron, I want to ask you about the the environment. You were the most recently in Congress. Everyone on our panel. Is this something that needs to be handled at a federal level? Is this a state issue? Is this a local issue? Everyone talks about turning down the temperature, but that's kind of empty rhetoric at this point, considering the stakes in these elections. So what can be done to actually make it safe so Ginnie doesn't have to worry about recruiting a whole new wave of election electors?

[00:09:35] **Speaker 4** Well, Zach, before I answer that, let me just thank you and Wisconsin PBS's for moderating and also Lee Rogers for his role in helping to organize this and help get the word out. Grayson Moore, who's been involved with the former members of Congress Association for all the work we've done, this now is former members in a nonpartisan or bipartisan fashion in Pennsylvania and Michigan and Arizona. They're going to be in North Carolina to try to get the word out in regards to the integrity of our election process. And that's really why we're here tonight, is to tell people that we're fortunate being in a state, Wisconsin, that does this very well, making sure that we have secure and safe and accurate and fair elections. And it's because of people like Julie Dank Meyer and the team that she has in the clerk's office and the professionalism and the seriousness in which they come to their job. We owe them a debt of gratitude and we owe them support and encouragement, not threats, not attacks, none of that because there's just no evidence or facts for us to doubt the integrity and the accuracy of our elections in Wisconsin, or I would submit virtually anywhere in our country there's going to be a role of federal oversight to make sure that constitutional rights are not being infringed. But the can. But conducting these elections is at a state and local level with people like Ginny and Ginny throughout the entire state, recruiting poll volunteers, staffing the clerk's office, studying the law and executing it to the best of their ability. And they've done that very well. And unfortunately, there are voices out there to sow the seeds of doubt in regard to the accuracy of our elections, and that undermines the very underpinnings of our democracy. If we don't have enough confidence that our votes can be accurately counted, we're going to see more January 6th. We're going to see more instances of violence from the see more instances of self-help, which is what we don't want to see because there's no basis or no facts to justify that type of action. And yet we're still in that danger zone because of the voices out there. And let's face it, there's one very prominent voice that is still out there perpetuating election lies Donald Trump. And we never had this problem, Zach, when I was in office all those years until he came to the national scene and he started talking about this from day one back in 2015 when he was announcing his candidacy, already talking about election fraud and how the election process can't be trusted. And he's continue that and he's doing it even now, months, if not years before the first ballot is even cast. For some reason, he's having a hard time internalizing the results of these elections. And unfortunately, he's militarizing that, as we saw on January 6th. And that's also the danger that we face today. So we're trying to, in a nonpartisan, bipartisan way, demonstrate with the facts. And the evidence actually shows. And making sure that we strike that right balance of accountability of how elections are run and making sure that we're doing it as accurately and as fairly as process. And as Tim alluded to, there's legal recourse if someone has any doubt about this that can be exercised. Donald Trump did after the. 2020 election 60 court challenges. Every one of those courts threw it out for lack of evidence and lack of facts. And yet, even then, he wasn't satisfied. And he's still perpetuating this myth out there that we have something to fear in our election process when all the facts show just the opposite. It's happened.

[00:13:06] **Speaker 1** Judy, I want to bring up a recent news story regarding elections in Wisconsin just a week or so ago that the clerk in the city of Madison issued a notice that they had accidentally sent out an additional 2000 duplicate ballots to voters. And walk us through how that can happen and how that can be ensure that there aren't 2000 double voters. And what that what the hell does that happen and how does it make up for that and what does that do to the integrity of the whole process when there are accidents? But then they're acknowledged and talked about how these won't result in votes?

[00:13:40] **Speaker 2** Yeah, that happens because elections are run by human beings and human beings makes mistakes. And when that mistake was made that Clark did the right thing, she called it out. She was transparent. She made it up. She put it out there like this is what happened. It was a human error. They were from what I heard, they were merging some spreadsheets together and they got duplicated. But, you know, every absentee ballot that sent out has a barcode on it. A voter is not able to send in two ballots. So it's still very secure. It abuse of someone was able to get a second ballot. Somehow they send it in. The clerks will be like, okay, you've already returned one ballot. We have it in our database that you return a ballot. The second ballot comes back. It's going to be rejected. So the fact that someone's going to get two of 2000 extra votes is not going to happen. You know, the clerk did the right thing. She was transparent. She said this is what happened. This is what we're doing to fix it. You know, this is why 2000 ballots extra are not going to be cast on Election Day.

[00:14:37] **Speaker 1** Read in northern Wisconsin is represented by Republican Tom Tiffany. And he had a Twitter exchange and some public relations exchanges with the court with the city of Madison, talking about how this looks like fraud. This looks like it's questioning whether there were, you know, buyer scans on the ballots themselves versus the absentee ballot envelope. What can you tell us about whether those comments were in good faith or if those playing into some of these election conspiracies out there that people generally want to know, how does this happen and how is a corrected and what is the role of a congressman in terms of asking questions there?

[00:15:14] **Speaker 5** I wouldn't presume to be able to tell you what was in his mind. And so what we can say is that the barcode has to be on the envelope because you don't want to connect the specific vote necessarily. We we get to vote in private in this country. And so, therefore, the the the ID has to be on the envelope, not on the ballot itself. And so that's part of it's part of how we have a secure system. And I do think that when you look at data, about 70 to 80% of Republicans would say that they don't trust that the elections are being conducted fairly. And something like that plays to that audience. And if you are always looking for a problem with elections and you're looking at on on X or on Facebook or wherever you whatever social media you use, the algorithms continue to feed you that same misinformation and it begins to reinforce until something becomes a belief. That's how urban legends get created. And I often I often tell people I would prefer that you don't trust politicians and your three of us up here telling you, yeah, yeah, you trust us. But I'll tell you who you can trust and you can trust your neighbor and that person when you go in to cast your ballot that's working at a polling place. Just gently, gently. Senior citizen. Usually somebody very interested in conducting a fair election. Why don't you see your IP ID and matching your your your address? And it's probably somebody that might start to approach ahead of you at church, visit the grocery store, might be your next door neighbor. So my my strongest advice is trust your neighbor and don't listen to the politicians. And when they tell you that your vote won't count. And I would also say this as a Republican, it's like the dumbest strategy in the world to tell people their vote doesn't count. Right. Why in the world would I vote as a Republican if I didn't believe my vote matter? That I think just from a pure political strategy, it's it's it's idiotic. And I don't understand it at all. But I trust what other 1800 clerk's office got 250 minutes before 1850 municipal clerks. And I mean, this is this is. Government at its finest. And so it's almost impossible to scam a system that is that disparate. And when you think of it, every state gets to run their own elections. And so it would just be the almost impossible to to have a conspiracy large enough to to cheat an election like that.

[00:18:11] **Speaker 1** So, Jenny, one of the other things that comes up a lot is the question about illegal immigrants or non-citizen voters voting in participating in elections. There's constitutional amendments regarding that very issue. The question of whether a non citizen can vote in a local election versus a federal or state election. So what are the processes that you have in place to make sure that only the people that are eligible to vote are.

[00:18:35] **Speaker 4** In fact voting?

[00:18:37] **Speaker 2** Yeah. So when someone goes to their municipal clerk and they register to vote, they fill out the voter registration form and it's ask you, are you a U.S. citizen? Are you 18 years of age? Have you been at the Centers for 28 days? And are you not a felon and or serving the felon sentence? And you proceed to fill out your address. You should provide your driver's license or ID card. And you know that information's entered into the database. It's compared with Social Security. So if someone passes away, we get the alert that this person has passed, it gets inactivated, and it's compared with the Department of Corrections. So we can pull out felons like this person's a felon. It's going to be inactivated. There's not currently a process to be able to check to see if someone's a U.S. citizen or not. That data is collected by the DMV, but it's not accessible to us. But the data also from the DMV can be up to eight years old at the time someone goes to get their state I.D. They may not be a U.S. citizen, but two, three years later, they may become a U.S. citizen. But that data is not going to be updated with the DMV. So in order for something to happen, for us to be able to check U.S. citizenship, it's going to have to be a law changed that's going to allow it. But I have to say that every election, something comes up, something in this case, non-citizens going to vote. Just something to throw out there. Just that little bit of doubt that you're going to not believe the outcome of these elections. Couple elections ago, it was all the dead people that were going to the polls and voting. And before that, it was all the felons that were going. And if you historically look at the data, and I have to say, there's never been proof, there's never been data showing that all these dead people or all these felons were going to the polls to vote. And the reports are on the commission's website. If you go and you look at them historically is ridiculously low. The amount of election fraud we have in the state of Wisconsin, it is just low. In the last 10 to 15 years, there's only been four instances of non-citizens actually voting. So when you say there's all these non-citizens are going to go to the polls to vote, that's just not happening for felons. It's single digits that the felons that are going to the polls. And probably the biggest case of fraud is people who are trying to vote twice. They're trying to vote absentee from their cabin up north, and then they go to the polls to vote in person at the polls. That's the highest amount of fraud happening. And still, we're looking at less than 20 cases for elections. When you're casting 3 million votes and you have 20 cases of fraud. It's ridiculously low, the amount of fraud that we have here. So I feel this rhetoric is just thrown out there. So everyone has just that little bit of doubt that we can always just question the results of these elections because, you know, this is your reason why. Because all these us, these non-citizens wouldn't vote it. And that's why the election didn't go the way a certain candidate wanted it to happen.

[00:21:17] **Speaker 5** Zack, can I just add one thing there? After I left Congress, I became the CEO of the National Roofing Contractors Association. The benefits that are put on lately, there's a pretty good chance that that's a Hispanic or Crip. I mean, roughly 70% of roofing workers in the US are immigrants. And I will tell you, having interacted with hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, some, I might even say most undocumented, I will tell you the last place on earth any illegal immigrant wants to be is at a government operation where they might be captured and deported. They are not voting. Now, you talked about non-citizens, but there are legal immigrants that are non-citizens. And that's where you typically have that disconnect, where they have to track it. But the idea that someone who came to the border six months ago is going in to vote is to me. I look at it, that is like the most absurd idea and one out of just not understanding how these undocumented workers that are moving about this underground economy in the U.S. operate. They do not want to be caught. They're not coming in to vote. They just are.

[00:22:28] **Speaker 4** Insecure. I think the reason Jayne's point, there are serious legal consequences. If you're purposely trying to vote twice, you're trying to manipulate the system and you can be held accountable for it. There was an election, this court in Colorado that was recently convicted of trying to manipulate ballot boxes. She was just sentenced to eight, nine years in prison for doing it, let alone undocumented workers here, for fear of facing some type of legal persecution. Citizens trying to do it will face legal consequences as well, which are which are very serious.

[00:22:59] **Speaker 3** And I think that the voting rules are public. And you can go and check whether someone has voted or not. And if anyone knows of an illegal immigrant and. You can go down and look and see what their name is on the voting roll. And if they voted, you can put them in the slammer, probably. But if people feel that's going on, they have an obligation to go down and check the voting rules and improve it. The whole system is checked and people can we can close elections and candidates have a chance to have recounts are all kinds of ways of taking. You know, the point I'd mention is that everyone who's elected is elected on the same bill as everyone else in that particular jurisdiction. And so if we saw fraud with a huge thank you to your county board members and told you about fraud and, you know, the town board members and city councilors, because they're all it's all the same bill and yet somehow it's just seems to be some sort of a media thing that's coming.

[00:24:02] **Speaker 4** Tim, I always find it hilarious that every member of Congress after the 2020 election that got elected did not dispute the wrong election result. This is a look at the presidential vote and for some reason they wanted it. But no, I mean, if you call it you're happy with the result and you didn't contested. Dan Yeah.

[00:24:20] **Speaker 5** So yeah, that ballot was, was not valid then. Their elections were not valid either. Right.

[00:24:25] **Speaker 1** Well, one of the things that I've dealt with in terms of my reporting is talking to election conspiracists or skeptics. And to me, the easiest rebuttal that has come about since 2020 is Ron Johnson being reelected in 2022. Because there is no world in which you can see that there are giant, vast conspiracies designed to elect Democrats when they allow a Republican senator, Ron Johnson, to win reelection by the narrowest of margins. They don't. If you're going to commit fraud, you do it Russian style and it's 98%, you know, Iraqi President Saddam days, it just it doesn't happen by 10,000 votes. So so, Ron, I do want to talk about that that issue, though, because in 2020, when Donald Trump filed those lawsuits, you referenced it was in Milwaukee and Dane Counties, and he did file lawsuits challenging voters and trying to throw absentee ballots around the state. He didn't do it here. He charged the two largest Democratic counties in the state. So I'm wondering if there was dramatic fraud in those counties. How did you get elected so much since you don't have either one of them in your district? But what does that say?

[00:25:27] **Speaker 4** It's a good point that in the end, it was a right that Donald Trump's campaign exercised. They had a right to ask for a recount because the margin was that close. But they chose only to exercise that right. Overwhelmingly Democratic districts and nowhere else throughout the state, which is already suspect. But the irony after those recounts was it was actually Joe Biden that got a few extra votes after the count, not Donald Trump. So someone had a beef about the election results in 2020. It was Joe Biden, not Donald Trump. I mean, it was really minuscule and small and insignificant. But nonetheless and this was on the back of 60 federal lawsuits that they had filed challenging the election results. And every one of those federal courts threw him out for lack of evidence or lack of any facts behind it. And yet, even today, he's not satisfied, which tells me that he knows what's going on and what his rhetoric is being used for. And it's unfortunate because it continues to undermine the very basis of our democracy. You know, the opening phrase of our own constitution, we, the people of the United States of America, in order to form a more perfect union, our founders placed us American citizens at the heart of our democracy. That comes with dual responsibilities and only responsibility to participate. Let our voices be heard and vote, but a responsibility, I feel, to accept the results of that election and to allow the peaceful transfer of power. And if we lose that as a country, our democracy is truly in peril. And we have one candidate today perpetuating that myth and trying to undermine the very basis of our democracy. Every day when he's out there campaigning and unfortunately, too many people are listening to that false rhetoric and taking action because of it. And again, the danger still exists. And that's one reason why, as former members are trying to get together to explain what we've observed throughout our public service careers and how well our elections are conducted in places like Wisconsin.

[00:27:26] **Speaker 1** So, Jenny, let's talk about voting machines and tabulators and I'm going to preamble this with another.