

The Wisconsin Poll Tax

The 24th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1964)

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

In his March 16 posting, your blogger referred to the economic analysis of an epidemic, as having features of an excise tax on desired purchases. Raising the price makes it more expensive to purchase goods, leading to reduced purchases, and loss of consumer well-being.

As recently as the 1960s, Texas, Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, and Virginia required that voters pay poll taxes to vote, and the latter three required payment of all missed poll taxes from prior years. These states argued that any reasonable citizen should be willing to pay a small tax in order to vote. The taxes were designed to disenfranchise poor and minority voters. They were successful.

In January 1964, the 24th Amendment, stated above was ratified. After some further court cases, the U.S. Supreme Court in the case *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections* (1966) ruled that the poll tax was unconstitutional at every level, not just for federal elections.

Your blogger is not a Constitutional scholar, but as we watch the Wisconsin election charade, the COVID-19 virus has levied an enormous poll tax on the Wisconsin voters. Without indulging in hyperbole, exactly how large a tax was the Wisconsin Republican Party, and its captive Supreme Court prepared to levy on Wisconsin voters? Those who went to vote put themselves and their fellow voters at risk for COVID-19 illness, and perhaps death. Those who stayed home, like those who could not afford the poll taxes the past century, lost their right to vote.

Wisconsin never had a poll tax until now. Shame on Wisconsin.

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