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## **Situation wanted: informed voters in Walworth County**

Walworth County government faces a watershed day April 1 when voters choose new board supervisors.

A referendum passed last year will reduce the number of supervisors from 25 to 11. That will make the county board one of the smallest in the state. The eyes of many Wisconsinites will be on Walworth County as voters elsewhere consider reducing their boards, as well, in hopes of making the governing bodies more wieldy and responsive.

A key factor in Walworth County's decision to downsize was the lack of choices for voters. Too often, incumbents ran for re-election unopposed.

If this initial election is any indication, downsizing worked. Voters have choices in all 11 districts. Incumbent supervisors face each other in three districts, and veterans of government are campaigning in other districts. Some races are hotly contested.

The Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission did a commendable job in helping the county draw 11 districts of nearly equal population.

Whether the county board works better with 11 supervisors instead of 25 remains to be seen. Many current supervisors fear having just 11 will leave each with too big a burden to fill the county's standing committees and still find a supervisor to serve each of the nine lake districts. Time could be an issue.

Walworth County is completing the last big piece to its infrastructure puzzle with construction on a new Lakeland School wrapping up ahead of schedule.

But voters must pay close attention and learn about the candidates for many other reasons. Taxes are a big issue in this campaign, and the current economic downturn won't help matters.

County sales tax revenue is falling far below budget, and the housing slump is reducing related permits and fee revenue. Meanwhile, costs of energy, salaries, health care and other benefits keep rising. County finances will continue to be a concern.

Likewise, development proposals will be a key issue. County government must work with municipal officials on strategic planning that doesn't overburden infrastructure, the lakes or groundwater. Already the county's deep aquifer is showing signs of significant drops.

In a democracy, government should be of, by and for the people. But for democracy to work, residents must research the issues and wisely pick leaders. If they don't, it shouldn't surprise them when government becomes their master instead of their servant.

Walworth County's historic election is too important to ignore.

Get busy. Get informed. Get out and vote April 1.