

## **I. In Focus This Week**

### **Registering new voters using old fashioned media?**

*Two Northwest states work with alternative weeklies to reach unregistered voters*

By [Paul Gronke](#)

Even with daily newspaper circulation numbers dropping and more and more papers restructuring or closing shop completely, two states in the Pacific Northwest are looking

In an interesting experiment, the [Bus Project](#), a grassroots citizen participation organization located in Portland, Ore., printed a valid Oregon voter registration form as ad advertising wrap for an alternative weekly publication, the [Portland Mercury](#) (approximate circulation 42,300).

The timing of the initiative was not coincidental — Oregon voters are being asked to vote on two controversial tax initiatives in January.

[Turnout in Oregon](#) is quite high — exceeding 85 percent in recent presidential contests — but turnout in special elections has typically lagged by as much as 20 percent, and the kinds of readers who pick up the *Mercury* turn out at low rates in special elections.

The Oregon experiment followed the lead of the [Washington Bus Project](#), which used a similar “wrap” on [The Stranger](#) (approximate circulation 89,000) during the 2008 election.

“We actually came up with the idea independently,” explained Caitlin Baggott, strategic director for Oregon’s Bus Project. “But then when we found out that they had done something similar in Washington, we talked to them about it and what worked and what didn’t.”

Coincidentally, the *Portland Mercury* and *The Stranger* are both free weeklies and both are owned by Index Newspapers, LLC.

The *Mercury* has 1,000 drop-boxes throughout Portland where the paper is distributed. Baggott said the Bus Project worked with the *Mercury* to target the 35 drop boxes with the highest pick-up rate and of those 35, the project worked with 12 of the establishments to put their own voter registration boxes for people to leave their completed forms.

Both voter registration organizations had to have the registration form pre-approved by the Secretary of State’s office, but in other respects the sister organizations followed a slightly different procedures.

The Oregon Bus paid \$3,000 for its wrap, while the Seattle paper used the wrap as a vehicle for advertising. Not surprisingly, most of the ads were from political campaigns.

This is a decidedly old media strategy to target new voters in a particular demographic. Will it work? Or does it just make more work for the local election officials?

Tim Scott, Director of [Elections in Multnomah County](#) is intrigued, but has some concerns.

“It is actually the weight of the paper that creates a problem for our scanners,” Scott writes in an email. “We scan each registration card to capture an image of the original document, (including) the signature.”

Because the registration card is so unique, however, Scott says it will be easy to track.

[State Representative Ben Cannon](#), who serves on the Bus Project Board and who is pushing same day registration in the Oregon legislature, has asked Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas counties to track the return rate.

The Washington Bus avoided these problems by printing their wrap on heavier stock, but ironically, this made it harder to track.

[Toby Crittenden](#) of the Washington Bus said they collected between 300 and 400 forms in drop boxes set up around Seattle, but have no idea how many others came into the King County office.

In Oregon, Baggott said 90 forms were turned in with about 25 of those coming in the 12 drop boxes. She attributed the low return rate on the timing of the project, which came right before the registration deadline.

“We got a lot of really good buzz about the project,” Baggott said. “Of course next time, it won’t be new so it won’t be as ‘cool,’ but this was definitely worth the price.”

## II. Election Reform News This Week

- The [Hawaii Elections Commission](#) is asking Attorney General Mark Bennett to examine whether a special election to fill the remainder of U.S. Rep. Neil Abercrombie's term can be delayed until the regular primary election in September. Under state law, the earliest a special election could be held is May 1. But the state elections office does not have the estimated \$800,000 it would cost to conduct an all-mail election. Gov. Linda Lingle plans to ask state lawmakers to pay for the special election with \$1.3 million that was recently found when an accounting error was discovered.
- Palm Beach County Elections Supervisor Susan Bucher wants to make sure that her office is [reimbursed more than \\$1.1 million it has spent on special elections](#) to fill the seats of departing state and federal politicians. Bucher has asked the county's legislative delegation for help securing state money she says her office is owed for holding elections to fill the three seats. State law requires the Department of State to reimburse counties that are forced to hold special elections to fill state and federal seats. But the law doesn't say when the money must be returned. With the state facing hefty budget shortfalls in the coming years, Bucher told the Palm Beach Post she wants to make sure her office gets the money. Jennifer Davis, a spokeswoman for the Department of State, said counties must submit their reimbursement requests before the start of the spring legislative session to be repaid in the coming year. State lawmakers decide how much money to set aside to reimburse local governments for holding special elections, she said.
- Proving once again that even the best laid plans can hit bumps in the road. Voters in one area of Douglas County, Ore. will vote on [replacement ballots](#) in this month's special election after their original ballots went missing somewhere along the way from the Eugene Post Office. County election officials say they didn't think anything was wrong until they received calls from Camas Valley residents last week, asking where their ballots were. This weekend, officials hand delivered the replacement ballots to Eugene, and Camas Valley voters received them Tuesday. Election officials still don't know where the missing ballots are.
- As you may have heard, Massachusetts held a special election this week and overall, things went relatively well, although many clerks were somewhat surprised by the [high turnout](#). Although concerns were raised over [voter fraud](#), Secretary of State William Galvin said that his office [could not substantiate](#) the claims. Many towns and cities reported a higher than normal number of inquiries from people who think they are registered to vote but who [aren't turning up on official voting lists](#). In Massachusetts, unlike other states, dead voters may legally vote — if they [cast](#)

[their absentee ballot before they die](#) as one voter in Springfield did that is. And although the trend nationwide seems more to be about closing polling places than opening new ones, following Tuesday's election, officials in the town of Danvers want to use [three polling places for future elections](#).

### III. Research and Report Summaries

*electionline provides brief summaries of recent research and reports in the field of election administration. Please e-mail links to research to [sgreene@pewtrusts.org](mailto:sgreene@pewtrusts.org).*

[The Other Voting Right: Protecting Every Citizen's Vote by Safeguarding the Integrity of the Ballot Box](#) - J. Kenneth Blackwell and Kenneth A. Klukowski, Yale Law & Policy Review, Fall 2009: This essay explores how the right to vote is two distinct rights – the right to cast a vote and the right to have legal votes not be tarnished by illegal votes. Blackwell, former Secretary of State of Ohio, provides the point of view of an election official and how the electoral system works in practice when administering an election. Additionally the paper examines how voting is not only a right but a civic duty that places some burdens on the voter. Specific examples of case law are cited that demonstrate the challenges in balancing these two distinct aspects of the right to vote.

[The Future of Election Reform: From Rules to Institutions](#) – Dan Tokaji, Yale Law & Policy Review, Fall 2009: Tokaji argues that election administration reform efforts should shift from the rules governing elections to the institutions that govern them and focus on the two dominant characteristics of our election system, the problems of decentralization and partisanship. In looking abroad he finds other countries have institutions that do a better job at managing elections. Additionally, recommendations are made to guide the next wave of reform in the U.S. including:

- Replacing party-affiliated chief election officials with entities that are more insulated from partisan politics;
- Caution from Congress should be imposed when imposing new mandates where implementation would require federal administrative oversight; and
- Federal courts, as the institution most independent of partisan politics, should play an essential role in policing the administration of elections for the foreseeable future.

[Election Management Guidelines](#) – The U.S. Election Assistance Commission, January 2010: The EAC has added five new chapters to its election management guidelines. Topics include: building community partnerships; canvassing and certifying an election; communicating with the public; conducting a recount; and provisional ballots.

[2010 Election Administration Policy Recommendations](#) – Project Vote, January, 2010: Project Vote has released a series of election administration policy recommendation memos for 11 states: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. In each of these states, laws are assessed and recommendations are made in six areas: voter registration; list maintenance; early voting and same-day registration; voter intimidation and suppression; (public agency registration; and provisional voting.

[Reform in an Age of Networked Campaigns](#) – Anthony Corrado, Thomas E. Mann, Norman J. Ornstein, and Michael J. Malbin, A Joint Project of The Campaign Finance Institute, American Enterprise Institute and Brookings Institution, January 2010: In this brief, the authors look to change the nature of the contentious campaign finance policy debate which tends to focus on either spending limits to restrain corruption or resistance to these limits in the name of protecting free speech. Instead of more attempts to restrict the wealthy few, the authors want to activate the many and promote equality and civic engagement by enlarging the participatory. The report surveys current conditions and makes a number of recommendations for moving forward including making it easier for citizens to access all election-related public information.

### IV. Opinion

Arizona: [Secretary of state](#)  
California: [Instant-runoff voting](#)  
District of Columbia: [Voting system](#)  
Hawaii: [Special election cost](#)  
Kansa: [Secretary of state race](#)  
Michigan: [Online voter registration](#)  
Minnesota: [Primary election date](#)  
New Hampshire: [Voter ID](#)  
Tennessee: [Voting system, II](#)  
Washington: [Felon voting rights, II](#); [Military and overseas voting](#)  
Wisconsin: [Voter ID](#)

*\*\*some sites require registration*

## **V. Job Opportunities**

*All job listings must be received by 12 p.m. Eastern on Wednesday for publication in our Thursday newsletter. Job listings are free but may be edited for length. Whenever possible, include Internet information. Please email job postings to [mmoretti@electionline.org](mailto:mmoretti@electionline.org)*