

I. In Focus This Week

Secretaries of state atwitter over Twitter

Election officials using site for election day updates, communication

By [Kat Zambon](#)

Want to keep up with the results of California's [May 19 special election](#)? Consider signing up to follow Debra Bowen, secretary of state on [Twitter](#), the micro-blogging site.

Between now and election day, Bowen is offering reminders and trivia and after the polls close, she will post results for the six ballot propositions and two special elections, according to a [press release](#).

"Californians are among the most tech-savvy voters in the nation," Bowen said. "Now I can offer them election news as it happens through Twitter. That way, people don't have to keep hitting 'refresh' on their computers or stay glued to their televisions to keep up with the latest."

A look at Bowen's Twitter page shows information on where voters who have lost their homes to foreclosure should cast ballots, the deadline to sign up to vote by mail, a reminder for voters casting ballots by mail that the first-class postage rate recently increased to 44 cents and the rules for employers about giving employees time off to vote. It also provides statistics on registered voters and turnout in past special elections.

As of Wednesday evening, CA SOS Vote had 127 followers.

Bowen isn't the only secretary of state on Twitter. Natalie Tennant, West Virginia secretary of state tweets nearly daily on her [page](#), usually about her speaking engagements and meetings. Recent tweets expressed her gratitude to her office for their participation in the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure and her concern for her fellow West Virginians affected by the recent flooding.

"The reason I do it is because I feel we should have an open government," Tennant told [WSAZ News Channel](#) in March. "Government does not have to be dry and boring. If you feel like you're connected, you may be more willing to take part in it."

[Karen Handel](#), Georgia secretary of state, [Bernie Buescher](#), Colorado secretary of state, [Mark Ritchie](#), Minnesota secretary of state, and [Sam Reed](#), Washington state secretary of state also tweet regularly. [Trey Grayson](#), Kentucky secretary of state appears the most popular with 832 followers with [Todd Rokita](#), Indiana secretary of state next with 560 followers.

Grayson and [Les Fugate](#), deputy assistant secretary of state used Twitter for communication and monitoring for the November 2008 election according to [GovTech.com](#).

"Clearly, the way that Americans communicate is changing rapidly," Grayson said. "Our office is trying to be on the cutting edge and communicate through as many avenues as possible. Hopefully, these efforts will allow us to communicate more rapidly and directly to our constituents."

"[Twitter] certainly presents its own kind of challenges ... it's pretty difficult in 140 characters to answer even a basic question about how the initiative process works," Bowen said. Occasionally she has routed inquiries sent to her through Twitter or her [Facebook](#) page to her constituent services office but Bowen is considering blogging in the future so when she answers one person's question, anyone can see her response.

“I see a whole range of tools that I plan to use” like wikis, Bowen said. “We’ll try them all, some of them probably won’t work ... [but] if you’re not afraid to experiment you can accomplish some amazing things.”

Using Twitter to communicate with poll workers in the field may be one experiment coming soon in California, Bowen said. “All it takes is for one of our five or six [poll workers] to have a Blackberry or something,” she said. During the February 2008 primary, Bowen had no way to inform poll workers at every polling place in California that voters who did not register with a party could vote in the Democratic primary.

“We didn’t even have a mechanism to be in contact with courts,” Bowen said, explaining that she had to call an Oakland County judge on his private phone in the February 2008 primary to see if there was a restraining order keeping the polls open. “We now have a means of communicating with the courts in each county,” she said.

Bowen learned from a post on her Twitter account that someone collecting signatures on a petition was misrepresenting the contents of the petition. After sending an investigator to look into the matter, the investigator learned that the signature-collector had an outstanding warrant.

Tweeting problems at the polls

Twitter has also been used as a way to track incidents at polling places. [Twitter Vote Report](#) was deployed for the November 2008 election and was [recently copied for the elections in India](#).

Andy Carvin, NPR social media senior strategist realized the tool’s potential during the March 2008 caucus in Texas when he learned via Twitter that voters were locked out of a caucus because the fire marshals wouldn’t let in any more people. The lock-out led to an argument between campaigns with one accusing the other of sending people there early to fill the room.

“It became pretty clear to us that even though NPR couldn’t have a reporter [everywhere] ... we had a community of stringers” through Twitter, Carvin said. Election protection organizations were encouraged to report incidents at the polls on Twitter and tag the reports with the hash tag (a word or phrase used to make it easier for someone to search a specific topic) “votereport,” Allison Fine from [TechPresident.com](#) said.

Knowing that Twitter can crash temporarily (when it does, users see the “fail whale”) Carvin said they set up Twitter Vote Report so someone could leave a report by telephone and include their zip code to plot the report on a map. Developers also coded applications for the iPhone and Android, the operating system for the Google phone. Dave Troy from [Twittervision.com](#) said that about 12,000 reports were received. NPR listeners were also encouraged to check out the map and look for patterns, Carvin said.

“Yes, it skews to younger voters. What’s so bad about that? It’s not the only mechanism for reporting,” Fine said.

II. Election Reform News This Week

- Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels this week put his [stamp of approval on one voting measure and vetoed the other](#). The election bill Daniels signed will let people with valid driver’s licenses or state identification file voter registration forms over the Internet. Currently, citizens can download registration applications online, but they must print and mail the forms. But he vetoed a second election bill, including a provision allowing vote centers, late Monday without specifying which parts of the legislation he disliked. “While this bill contains provisions that would make the act of voting more convenient, it does not contain sufficient safeguards against fraud and abuse and removes long-standing bipartisan checks and balances in the conduct of elections,” Daniels wrote to lawmakers in his veto message.

- Although Indiana's governor vetoed legislation that would allow for the creation of vote centers, more and more jurisdictions are reducing the number of polling sites nationwide. Several jurisdictions in Pennsylvania are mulling closing/consolidating polling places. In [Schuylkill County](#), commissioners are considering a proposal to eliminate 46 precincts. In [Lancaster County](#), the county is racing to beat a moratorium issued by the state on redrawing the lines of voting precincts. In [Monroe County](#), five polling places are being moved after problems occurred during the November elections. Ohio recently gave [Clark County](#) approval to redraw some of the county's voting precincts. Even school districts that rely on county equipment are getting in on the act in [one Minnesota county](#) by reducing their number of polling places from nine to six. In [Salem, Mass.](#) the popular polling place at the local Y is looking for a new home after high voting traffic caused logistical problems during the last election. In [Jackson County, Fla.](#), the county commission voted to pare down the number of polling sites from 25 to 14 in order to save money. And in [Frederick, Md.](#), finding suitable polling locations is about as difficult as finding a new home. After the county school system said schools could no longer be used for polling places, the city looked at 30 different locations before settling on six for the upcoming municipal elections.
- Instant-runoff voting had its day in court this week when the [Minnesota Supreme Court heard testimony on whether instant runoff voting is unconstitutional](#). Opponents of the system, which allows voters to rank the candidates for an office in order of preference, want to block Minneapolis from implementing instant runoff voting for its municipal elections this fall. Even though the state Supreme Court hasn't ruled yet, the instant runoff voting opponents already predict they'll appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. Andy Cilek, who's leading the charge against instant runoff voting in Minneapolis, didn't see many hopeful signs at today's hearing. "As of right now, it doesn't look good for us," Cilek, the executive director of the Minnesota Voters Alliance told Minnesota Public Radio. Cilek's group argues instant runoff voting violates the constitutional principal of "one person, one vote." They also say it undermines equal protection of the law and freedom of association. Minneapolis voters approved instant runoff voting in 2006. It applies only to city offices like mayor and city council, and is scheduled to take effect this year. A lower court ruled the system constitutional, but opponents appealed that decision to the state Supreme Court.

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.

[Election Reform Agenda Conference](#) - Department of Political Science, University of Iowa, May 7-May 9, 2009

At a [conference](#) held last week at the University of Iowa, research was presented on a number of election administration issues including voting technology, early voting, voter registration and the presidential nominating process.

[Access to Democracy: Identifying Obstacles Hindering the Right to Vote](#) - Prepared by Scott E. Thomas, Alicia C. Insley and Jennifer L. Carrier for Women's Voices. Women Vote, April 15, 2009
Consolidating and summarizing research from other resources, the report focuses on five areas described as the most significant obstacles to voting and where reform has the potential to yield the most positive results: voter registration, absentee and early voting, voter identification requirements, provisional ballots and voter lists.

IV. Opinion

Voting Rights Act: [I](#), [II](#), [III](#), [IV](#), [V](#), [VI](#), [VII](#)

National: [Overseas voting](#)

Arizona: [Yuma City](#)

California: [Electronic voting machines](#); [Vote-by-mail](#)

Colorado: [Instant-runoff voting](#)

Connecticut: [Early voting](#)
Florida: [Election cycles](#)
Indiana: [Voting reform](#)
Missouri: [Voter ID](#)
Ohio: [Voting standards](#)
Pennsylvania: [ACORN](#); [Voter rolls](#)
South Carolina: [Early voting](#)
Tennessee: [Vote count](#)
Texas: [Voter ID, II, III](#)

***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