

I. In Focus This Week

Internet voting for military and overseas voters debuts in West Virginia

Clerks and secretary of state pleased with first use

By [M. Mindy Moretti](#)

A small, but significant group of voters made a bit of voting history in the recent West Virginia primary when they securely cast their ballots online.

Five counties in the Mountain State — Jackson, Kanawha, Marshall, Monongalia, and Wood — participated in an [online voting pilot project for military and overseas voters](#) during last week's election and even though turnout was comparatively small, everyone agrees the program was a success.

According to the secretary of state's office, 80 percent of those who requested their credentials to vote online actually cast a ballot. That's compared a return rate of 40 percent for overseas mail ballots and a 25 percent return rate for email/fax.

"Even though there weren't a lot of participants, military/overseas voting is historically a small turnout and is very difficult with mailing prohibitions and deadlines. This procedure was a huge improvement from the traditional absentee procedure," said Jan Pest, [Marshall County](#) clerk.

Pest said 15 Marshall County residents received their credentials — log-in information — and that 12 of those ended up voting.

Unlike other previous pilot programs that had overseas voters casting ballots from specific locations abroad, the West Virginia pilot allowed overseas voters to request online credentials — user name and password — and then cast their ballot on any computer using a secure military-style encryption connection.

The state worked with [Scytl, USA](#) and [Everyone Counts, Inc.](#) to create the secure online system.

[Secretary of State Natalie Tennant](#) said West Virginia was able to accomplish a successful pilot online voting project because of the state's willingness to try new things.

"From the beginning of my term I wanted our office to be progressive and lead with bold initiatives. We have a forward thinking group of people in the secretary of state's office. The state legislature also allows for best practices exploration; our county clerks are willing to try new things," Tennant said.

Very few problems were reported with the process and although overall [Wood County](#) Clerk Jamie Six was pleased with the program, there are elements about it that he said need changing or tweaking.

"To work on a state wide level, it needs to be something the counties can run without the need for company staff on site," Six said. "Another concern is the two level password the county commission and county clerk enter in. If something would happen to one of us and we didn't leave the password with someone, how would the ballots get counted?"

Six said the county requested to participate in the program because the local National Guard detachment was about to be deployed and the county wanted to provide them the opportunity to vote.

In Wood 25 military/overseas voters requested online credentials and 22 of those voters cast ballots. Comparatively, 11 requested mail ballots and only two of those were returned. While most of the ballots were cast in advance, two ballots were cast online on election day — from Austria and Norway.

Tennant said her office will be talking to the counties to see how the system can be improved.

“Of course, no process is perfect and improvements can always be made. However no technical difficulties were reported and the number of ballots produced matched the reported ballots cast,” Tennant said.

[Kanawha County](#) Clerk Vera McCormick said she loved Internet voting and only wished that more military/overseas voters had taken advantage of the opportunity. Of the 17 credentials issued, 11 ballots were cast.

“I think anything we can do to help our military to be able to vote more conveniently, and ensure that their ballot is received by our office is necessary,” McCormick said.

The state allocated up to \$150,000 for the project. But after everything is said and done Tennant said she doesn’t believe the state will have spent even half that.

Probably the biggest barrier faced by the project was voter education.

“In the future we need to have the cooperation of the military in being more active in informing the service persons that this is available,” Pest said. “We tried to get the message out to families through the media so they could contact their family members to inform them about this opportunity, but even more publicity is needed.”

All responding clerks who participated in the program said they would like to see this become a permanent part of the state’s voting arsenal. Tennant said the pilot program will be reviewed for full [MOVE Act](#) compliance and how it may be integrated with other MOVE Act measures to be implemented statewide.

II. Election Reform News This Week

- **2010 Primaries:** Several states held primaries this week. In **Kentucky**, 42 counties used [new paper ballots](#) for the first time this week and there were very [few reported problems](#) throughout the state. Boone County did [run out of GOP ballots](#) and there were [reports of voter fraud](#) from the Eastern part of the state. And Secretary of State [Trey Grayson](#) lost his bid for U.S. Senate. After his concession speech Grayson said that he would finish out his term as secretary of state and has not decided whether he will seek another term. “We’ll see what the future holds-- not ruling anything out at this point,” he told a local television station. Problems were reported in several jurisdictions in **Pennsylvania** on Tuesday. A [voting machine malfunctioned](#) in Crawford County, but election officials were able to retrieve the information. A Lower Mount Bethel Township woman claims [bad advice from a poll worker](#) made her unable to vote in most races today. And a GOP attorney in Uniontown claimed that 178 voters were able to [vote twice](#). It was relatively smooth sailing in **Arkansas** on election day with a few issues in [Farmington](#) and one very well publicized snafu when [Sen. Blanche Lincoln](#) had to vote using a provisional ballot. Prior to election day, a candidate for county clerk in Carroll County had sought to have all [electronic voting machines impounded](#), but no action was ever taken on the request. And although one might not know it from the lack of media coverage, **Oregon** also held its vote-by-mail primary this week. [About 41 percent of Oregon’s registered voters](#) cast their ballots by mail, a number higher than what Secretary of State Kate Brown had predicted. And tightly contested race for [Clackamas County clerk](#) will head to a runoff in November.

- Santa Clara County became the first known county in the country to [accept completed voter registration forms from a mobile-touch device](#) (iPad, iPhone, etc.). Late last week, eight people submitted their completed forms. According to the *San Jose Mercury News*, County Registrar Jesse Durazo made the decision to permit the electronic signatures after the county board of supervisors and county counsel gave their blessings to the proposal by Verafirma, a Silicon Valley company. "It's truly awesome and fantastic that a county registrar is allowing this to happen. It's a huge, huge step," said Thomas Bates, vice president for civic engagement at Rock the Vote, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that registered 2 million new voters in the 2008 election. "We're supportive of anything that modernizes the antiquated voter-registration system in our country."
- **Money Watch:** Even with three proposed unpaid furlough days, [Broward County's](#) supervisor of elections office will not meet the 14 percent cut demanded by county commissioners. The [North Carolina](#) State Board of Elections estimates the cost of second primaries in North Carolina on June 22 will total somewhere between \$4 million and \$5 million. No federal or state dollars will help cover the costs to open the polls and pay precinct workers. In an effort to save "thousands of dollars" the city of [Greenwood, S.C.](#) moved one step closer this week to moving its elections to coincide with other elections in November. [Clay County, Fla.](#) will conduct its first-ever all-mail election this fall in an effort to save money.
- [Pennsylvania's Secretary of State Pedro Cortes](#) announced Wednesday he is resigning. He will be taking a job with San Diego-based Everyone Counts, a company involved in helping soldiers, overseas residents and the disabled vote. His last day is June 11. A successor hasn't been named.

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 Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy - Volume 9, Number 2, June 2010](#) (subscription required): This most recent issue includes a book review of Heather Gerken's *The Democracy Index* and two book reviews focusing on studies of the presidential nomination process.

IV. Opinion

Arizona: [Fair elections](#); [Vote fraud](#)

California: [Overseas voters](#); [Instant-runoff voting](#); [Ballot mistakes](#)

Iowa: [Voter ID](#)

Indiana: [Voting process](#)

Michigan: [Election reform](#); [Cuts in elections](#)

Montana: [Voting options](#); [Primary election](#)

New York: [Special election](#)

Oregon: [Voter registration](#)

South Carolina: [Voter ID](#)

West Virginia: [Problem-free elections](#); [Poll workers](#); [Military and overseas voters](#)

Wisconsin: [Voter ID](#)

***some sites require registration*

V. Available Grants

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) announces the availability of up to approximately \$500,000 in funds for a two-year grant focused on research to [improve voting technology and processes for recently injured military personnel](#). Funds will support research to better understand the needs of

injured military personnel in major hospital, recovery, and rehabilitation facilities related to election processes, including: 1) documentation of current practices associated with voting activities at these facilities; 2) identification of barriers that may prevent this population from voting privately and independently; and 3) reviews and assessments of new and innovative technologies for assisting military personnel's ability to participate in the electoral process.

VI. 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