

I. In Focus This Week

EAC translates voter guides to Native American and Native Alaskan languages

Languages include Cherokee, Lakota, Yup'ik and Navajo

By [M. Mindy Moretti](#)

Citizens who speak [Cherokee](#), [Lakota](#), [Navajo](#) and [Yup'ik](#), the most commonly spoken American Indian and Alaska Native languages in the U.S., now have access to federal election voter guides in their native languages.

The [U.S. Election Assistance Commission's](#) (EAC) Language Assistance Program translated the guides to improve voting accessibility for Americans who speak these languages and have limited English proficiency.

The guide explains the basics of ballot casting as well as special voting procedures, such as early voting, absentee voting, and military and overseas voting.

These guides follow in the heels of a Spanish-language voter's guide and voter's guides in five Asian languages.

According to Jeannie Layson, spokesperson for the EAC, the commission tackled these languages because they are all covered by [Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act](#).

"Also, as the Census did not provide the exact Native American/Alaskan Native languages, we convened a working group to identify the most commonly spoken languages," Layson said. "Working group participants included election officials, tribal representatives, and advocates, and the focus was on how to meet the needs of voters who use languages that are primarily oral, not written."

EAC assembled a working group composed of local election officials, representatives of advocacy groups, inter-tribal council members, and representatives of the Department of Justice to help identify the language needs of Native Americans and Alaska Natives.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2006-2008 American Community Survey, roughly 220,500 Americans speak one of these four languages. A large majority reside in Alaska, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Layson said the biggest challenge of translating the voter's guides was the fact that many of these languages are traditionally only oral languages. The EAC contracted with [Compass Languages](#) to translate the guides and relied on the expertise of the working group.

"Our contractor reached out to its contact(s) who had an expertise in certain non-written languages and worked with individuals within that tribe to verify the translation of the guide," Layson explained.

Not everyone is happy about the EAC's new voter guides. [South Dakota Secretary of State](#) Chris Nelson — who has not had an opportunity to review the new voter guide — does not necessarily think this is the best use of federal resources.

"I cannot think of a greater waste of taxpayer dollars than this production," Nelson said in an email. "Lakota is an unwritten language. The very few people who only speak Lakota don't read Lakota, they speak it."

In South Dakota, the secretary of state's office contracts for the translation of the ballot and those election notices that would be the same for all counties. According to Nelson this is done as an efficiency measure. The translations are then passed on to all 11 counties that have a Section 203 minority language requirement. Local county auditors hire the bilingual poll workers for election day.

In Arizona, in addition to Spanish and English, voting materials are also translated for members of the following local tribes: Apache, Navajo, Hopi, Tohono O'odham, Pascua Yaqui and Yuman. Counties have tribal outreach coordinators who meet with tribal leaders to make certain election materials are translated accurately and voter materials are provided in a useful manner for area residents. On Election Day, bilingual poll workers are provided according to Voting Rights Act mandates.

"At first glance, the new EAC voter guide appears to be a worthwhile and valuable reference for voters," said Matthew Benson, director of communications for the [Arizona Secretary of State's](#) office. "As with other states, some Arizona regulations with regard to identification required at the polls and other issues differs from the federal rules stated in the guide. Overall, however, we believe the new EAC guide will provide helpful additional information to both Arizona voters and local elections officials."

While there are dozens of languages spoken in the U.S. Layson said voter guide translations are on hold now until the results of the 2010 Census determine what languages will be translated next.

II. Election Reform News This Week

- The first town in Georgia trying to seek [relief from its inclusion in the Voting Rights Act](#) is running into homegrown opposition. This week, the Fulton County commission approved a resolution rebuking Sandy Springs' efforts. According to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the resolution opposing Sandy Springs' request carried no legal weight, but it sharply defined the differences between the county and a city that incorporated four years ago, with the latter claiming its residents are not receiving proper attention and service from the former and then seeking to be relieved from federal oversight of elections. After an unsuccessful attempt to run its own elections last fall, Sandy Springs requested the U.S. Justice Department exempt it from federal oversight earlier this year. Sandy Springs paid \$400,000 for Fulton County to run the election. Commissioner Chairman John Eaves, who co-sponsored the resolution, said the lack of a Sandy Springs history was troubling. "To qualify for an exemption you need proof that there was no discrimination in the past 10 years, and Sandy Springs does not even have a 10-year history," Eaves said. "We think the Voting Rights Act still applies."
- Alabama, [Mississippi](#) and [New Mexico](#) held primary elections this week and although things were relatively quiet in Mississippi and New Mexico a few pockets of trouble arose in [Alabama](#). At least 6 to 8 people in Dallas County voters went to polls Tuesday to vote but were initially denied because an absentee ballot had been cast in each of their names. These people were given provisional ballots and allowed to vote. The anomalies were reported to Secretary of State Beth Chapman, who acknowledged the reports Tuesday. At the time, Chapman issued a statement saying she will have "zero tolerance" for voter fraud. Probate Judge Kim Ballard told the Selma Times-Journal mishaps occur, usually when a person forgets they applied for an absentee ballot or someone is on record as having received an absentee ballot when, in fact, insufficient mailing addresses prevented the ballot from arriving. "There have been very few cases that we can point to as intentional fraud, but when you have campaign workers out there being paid to go collect absentee ballots, and in some cases paid by the number they collect, the avenue for intentional fraud is out there," Ballard said. "I wish there was some way we could totally put a stop to that, but there's not."
- The publisher of the *Shepherdstown Observer* has [sued West Virginia Secretary of State Natalie Tennant](#), alleging that she is misapplying election law and stifling the paper's investigation into alleged voting irregularities. In a lawsuit filed this week in Kanawha Circuit Court, Thomas Harding maintains that Tennant's office has used a pending investigation against him to prevent

him from publishing information about a controversial zoning referendum in Jefferson County. The Observer filed a Freedom of Information Act request for the petition, but in a decision that was upheld by Jefferson County Circuit Judge David Saunders in August 2009, the county clerk refused to turn over the list of names. The Observer appealed Saunders' ruling, and in January the state Supreme Court agreed to hear the appeal. The FOIA case is pending. Tennant spokesman Jake Glance told the *Charleston Daily Mail* the Secretary of State's Office had not seen a copy of Harding's lawsuit and would not comment on it.

- As one of the oldest public buildings in continuous use in the United States, the Town House in Massachusetts is an icon of democratic government. Some believe it has [served as a polling place for every election since it was built in 1727](#). But according to the *Salem News*, that streak will end June 15 by order of the state, which is citing both the federal Americans with Disabilities and the Help America Vote acts. After making a recent inspection, the state has told Marblehead that the Town House is inaccessible to disabled people, forcing Town Clerk Robin Michaud to move the precinct to the community center on Humphrey Street. New voting machines for the disabled now take up too much room, Michaud told the paper. Nevertheless, the situation has sparked sharp responses from Marbleheaders, like town historian Bette Hunt, who declared, "I'm outraged. ... Where do I go to scream?" She feels strongly that tradition should be honored despite the fact her husband is disabled and must have assistance to vote. Selectman Bill Woodfin reacted hotly at Wednesday night's board meeting. "They can pound sand, as far as I'm concerned," he said, complaining that the state allowed no time to appeal or to take steps to make the building accessible.

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.

[Open Primaries and Top Two Elections: Proposition 14 on California's June 2010 Ballot](#) - Molly Milligan, Center for Governmental Studies (CGS), May 2010: CGS examines the pros and cons of Proposition 14 on next week's ballot in California, where in primary elections state and congressional (but not Presidential) candidates from all political parties would compete together in a single, open primary, with candidates for each office from all the parties appearing on the same ballot. Candidates could voluntarily identify themselves with a political party, or not. The general election would then include the top two finishers of the open primary.

[The Voter Registration Requirements of Sections 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the National Voter Registration Act \(NVRA\) Questions and Answers](#) – Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, June 1, 2010: The Department posted new questions and answers about the National Voter Registration Act.

[2010 Election Administration and Voting Survey](#) – June 2010: The federal Election Assistance Commission has released final versions of the 2010 Election Administration and Voting Survey and Statutory Overview instruments. Additionally it has provided a Guide to the Election Administration and Voting Survey.

IV. Opinion

National: [Voter registration](#); [Military and overseas voting](#)

California: [Voting system](#)

Minnesota: [Election reform](#); [Secretary of state](#)

Mississippi: [Voter ID](#); [Early voting](#)

New Jersey: [Absentee voting](#)

Ohio: [Election reform](#)

South Carolina: [Early voting](#)

Texas: [Cloistered clerks](#); [Harris County](#)

West Virginia: [Lincoln County](#)

Wisconsin: [Voting system](#)

***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