

electionlineWeekly — August 12, 2010 ***electionline.org***

I. In Focus This Week

Primary wrap-up: Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, and Minnesota

New procedures increase turnout in some states, summer heat doesn't deter voters

By [M. Mindy Moretti](#)

Voters went the polls across the country again this week as states continued to make their way through the primary process.

Colorado

For the first time, Colorado counties were permitted to conduct elections entirely by mail and 46 of the state's 64 counties took advantage of the option. The results were higher turnout and fewer issues for many counties.

Turnout in [Routt County](#) was nearly three times higher than it was for the 2006 mid-term elections. Clerk and Recorder Kay Weinland told the *Steamboat Pilot* that the mail-in ballot system likely contributed to the turnout of about 44 percent of Republicans, 31 percent of Democrats and 16 percent of Libertarians among active registered voters.

Even before election day, a record number of voters had turned out in [Boulder County](#). While Clerk Hillary Hall acknowledged that tight races were likely contributing to turnout, she told *The Daily Camera* she believes it's not as large a factor as the decision to use only mail-in ballots.

While only about a quarter of voters in [El Paso County](#) participated in the primary, most of those voters chose to do so by mail. Less than 20 percent of the overall votes were cast on election day. "There's no question that mail ballots are the wave of the future," Clerk and Recorder, Bob Balink told KKTU. "I just want to put in a plug for 95 percent of the county clerks that believe it's the most safe, accurate and secure election you can conduct."

Not including ballots dropped off on election day, almost twice as many residents in [Larimer County](#) cast a ballot in Tuesday's election than did in the 2008 primary. "The returns are much heavier than we've ever had in the past in a primary election, which is pretty darned exciting for us," Larimer County Clerk and Recorder Scott Doyle told 9News.

Connecticut

The major news out of the Nutmeg state on this primary election day involved the secretary of state race — well at least half of it, and 17-year olds.

On the [secretary of state](#) front, Republican candidate Jerry Farrell, who did not have a challenger, will face Democratic State Rep. Denise Merrill in the November general election.

And a handful of the state's eligible 2,093 [17-year olds](#) took advantage of Connecticut's new law that allowed them to vote on Tuesday since they will be 18 before the November general election. "I wanted to register now -- I didn't think twice about it," 17-year-old Michael Levy told the *Connecticut Post* about his decision. "I'm fairly interested in politics so I knew I'd want to vote."

Georgia

Tuesday wasn't primary day in Georgia, it was primary run-off day and turnout throughout the state was predictably low.

While a low turnout can often mean a very slow day for poll workers, some workers at an elementary school in Thomasville were cheered by the fact that school was back in session and they got to share the gym with students. "It's a little noisy compared to July but they're keeping us entertained. It's [not a boring day even though it is slow](#). We haven't had that many people in today," Nell Revell, a Scott Elementary Poll Official told a local television station.

Even with a low turnout, there were a few problems on Tuesday including the [wrong address for a polling place](#) listed on voter cards in Fulton County. The elections director for the Fulton County Voter Registration office told a local television station they sent out letters last week with the correct precinct address. But apparently, some letters didn't get to voters on time.

Minnesota

The heated political races weren't the only things that were hot in Tuesday's primary in Minnesota. Due a heat wave that has had much of the nation in its grip, some polling places were sweltering. This was also the [first year that Minnesota has held its primary in August](#). The primary was moved to accommodate the MOVE Act.

In [Olmstead County](#), barn fans had to be put up in several polling places to cool things down—or at least help circulate the air. Election official Mark Krupski told the *Post Bulletin* that a lot of buildings either don't have air conditioning or didn't have it turned on because they're typically not fully occupied at this time of year.

In anticipation of problems the humidity may cause with ballots, [Traverse Township](#) Clerk Helen Wenner told KEYC that election officials took all the measures they need so they won't have any rejections. "We had a township meeting last night, so we had the dehumidifier running, trying to get most of the humidity out of the air. It wasn't too bad. We brought in some fans and our homemade air conditioner and things have been going pretty good so far." Wenner says election officials even took the ballots home last night to lay flat in the air conditioning.

The move to an August election saw a decrease in voters in [Winona](#) where many students had not yet returned for the start of the fall semester. "We knew going in, all of us, that this would not be a busy day," poll judge Sue Edel told the *Winona Daily News*.

In addition a new month for a primary, Minnesota voters were faced with [new absentee voting procedures](#) — procedures that were put into place after the 2008 Franken vs. Coleman race ended in a court battle weeks after ballots were cast. A state law has streamlined the absentee voting process allowing absentee ballot boards at the county level to review the voter information on absentee ballots up to five days after arrival. Two weeks before election day, they have up to three days.

Whether it was the moved-up primary or the new procedures, [more Minnesotans than ever before cast absentee ballots](#) in this week's primary. By Monday afternoon, local election officials had accepted 28,992 absentee ballots -- busting the two decade record of 25,257 ballots set in 1998.

Besides the heat, there were a few other problems on election day. In Chaska there was a [45-minute power outage](#) around mid-day, but voting machine immediately switched to battery and voting continued. And in [St. Louis County](#), the new absentee voting procedures slowed down the vote count which county officials chalked up to the size of the county.

II. Election News This Week

- The [settlement of a lawsuit over electronic voting machines](#) will mean cash payments and savings on equipment, software and licensing fees for Ohio boards of elections that purchased machines originally manufactured by Diebold Inc. Nearly half of Ohio's counties — including Montgomery, Greene, Miami, Darke and Butler — use the machines and are eligible to benefit from the settlement with Premier Election Solutions announced Wednesday, Aug. 11, by Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner. Premier Election Solutions purchased the Diebold voting

machine business and was subsequently purchased by Election Systems and Software of Nebraska, which is participating in the settlement. Diebold originally sued Brunner and Cuyahoga County in 2008 after that county shelved the machines. Brunner counter sued Franklin County Common Pleas Court because of serious problems found with the voting machines. The Montgomery County Board of Elections last month reached its own settlement of the lawsuit. "I am pleased that our efforts to work with Premier have resulted in an equitable settlement that will benefit our county boards and ultimately the state's voters and taxpayers," Brunner told the *Dayton Daily News*.

- North Carolina election officials were under fire this week for their seemingly close relationship with a vendor that provides the majority of ballots to the state's counties. Late last week both Democrats and Republicans [raised questions about State Board of Elections](#) officials after reports surfaced about private jets and the high price of ballots. The News & Observers reported last week that a New Bern company, Print elect, which prints voting ballots for 86 of the state's 100 counties, often charges twice what another printer charges. The company is the sole agent in the state for Election Systems & Software, the Omaha, Neb., corporation that won a concession in 2006 to sell and maintain voting machines in the state. That arrangement gives Printelect, which also represents ES&S in South Carolina and Virginia, a big advantage in getting printing jobs. The company has [denied that it has any special privilege](#). On Thursday, the *News & Observer* also reported that the North Carolina Association of Election Directors had [solicited \\$5,000 from the printing company](#) to be a sponsor for a recent association party. Melva Basnight Garrison, the Dare County elections director and the association's president, told the paper it never occurred to her that there might be a conflict of interest in government employees soliciting money from a private contractor paid with taxpayer funds.
- Early and absentee voting got underway in Florida this week and it wasn't without some problems. A [design flaw in absentee envelopes](#) causes post office machines to scan a voter's return address instead of the destination address. According to the *News Press*, postal officials were made aware of the issue Tuesday and have begun telling employees to watch for the ballots and sort them by hand to make sure they get to elections officials rather than the return address. Lee County Supervisor of Elections Sharon Harrington told the paper she got several calls Tuesday and is worried votes from some of the 40,500 requested absentee ballots in Lee County won't be counted if they don't end up in her office by 7 p.m. Aug. 24. "It's not getting to where it needs to go," Harrington said. "I was not a happy camper when I heard we were having problems." According to U.S. Postal Service spokeswoman Debra Mitchell, the problem is a design flaw on the envelopes. Because the post office sorting machines scan for bar codes starting in the middle of an envelope and move outward, they first pick up the bar code for the voter's return address, which is closer to the middle of the envelope than the destination address.
- A small but significant victory has been won by Chester County voters who waited for hours in the rain to take part in the 2008 presidential election. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, they have persuaded county officials to [move a polling place back to the campus of Lincoln University](#) after a lawsuit arising from a chaotic Election Day in November 2008. The county's decision to move the poll, announced this week, was part of a settlement of a suit in which five voters claimed the Board of Elections had violated the Voting Rights Act of 1965. "We are delighted," said Michael Churchill, a lawyer with the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia, who represented the plaintiffs. "It is tragic that so many were prevented from voting - or inconvenienced - and it took a lawsuit to fix the problem." A coalition of civil rights groups sued in federal court in January, alleging that voters in the Lower Oxford East District, which includes Lincoln University, were prevented from voting because of inadequate facilities at the Lincoln Community Association Building poll location. The polling place had been moved from Lincoln's campus in the 1990s, sparking controversy. On Election Day in 2008, lines at the small community center were so long throughout the day that many waited for up to seven hours. Some stood in the rain and on nearby railroad tracks. Others left in frustration and didn't vote.

III. Opinions

National: [Voting Rights Act](#); [National Voter Registration Act](#)
Arkansas: [Secretary of state race](#)
Colorado: [Instant runoff voting](#); [Overseas voting](#); [Early voting](#)
Florida: [Early voting](#); [Absentee ballots](#)
Georgia: [Voter registration](#)
Illinois: [Election reform](#)
Indiana: [Satellite voting](#)
Minnesota: [Felon voting rights](#)
New Mexico: [Voter ID](#)
North Carolina: [Ballots](#)
Oklahoma: [Voter ID](#)
Tennessee: [Primary election](#)
Utah: [Vote-by-mail](#)
Vermont: [Voting system](#)
West Virginia: [Secretary of state](#)
Wisconsin: [Election fraud task force](#)