

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

### **Louisiana elections changed five years after Katrina**

*One eye on the weather as voters head to the polls for early voting and primary*

By [M. Mindy Moretti](#)

Five years ago next week the country watched in horror as the devastation of [Hurricane Katrina](#) became abundantly clear in live Technicolor on televisions across the country.

Although Louisiana has conducted several successful elections since then — including a mayoral primary in New Orleans nine months after the storm that forced the state and parish to almost completely re-do how elections are done — with early voting currently underway for a primary that falls just one day before the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the hurricane's landfall, election officials have one eye on the weather.

"We are much more prepared today just from having experienced Hurricane Katrina and then Hurricane Rita and then Hurricane Gustav, just to name a few that followed thereafter," said Angie La Place, commissioner of elections for Louisiana.

Since 2005, the state has gone through a number of changes directly linked to the affects of the storm. New Orleans has decreased the number of polling sites and the state created an 800 toll-free number to help residents find voting information, increased the number of days of early voting to include two Saturdays and increased the hours until 6 pm.

The state has also made improvements on its website at [www.GeauxVote.com](http://www.GeauxVote.com) to assist voters statewide in registering to vote online, obtaining forms for absentee voting by mail, and in finding specific election information such as their polling places and sample ballots.

Probably the biggest change to elections in Louisiana since Hurricane Katrina would be the size of the voting rolls. Thousands of voters that parish registrars determined no longer lived in Louisiana were purged from the voting rolls in 2007 and 2008.

On June 15, 2007, [53,554 notices were mailed to voters](#) saying they must give up their registration in other states or risk losing the right to vote in Louisiana. Voters were given one month to prove they had canceled their out-of-state registrations. After that, they had to appear in person at their voter registrar's office with documentation that their non-Louisiana registration had been canceled. On Aug. 17, 2007 election officials said more than 21,192 people had been dropped — of those, 6,932 were from Orleans Parish.

In St. Bernard Parish, a parish that was almost completely destroyed by the hurricane, 13 percent of the parish's registered voters were purged. Registrar of voters Velma Bourg send out canvassing cards in early January 2008 and after the return of cards trickled to halt in May, she purged the rolls.

"We didn't have anything near this," Bourg [told](#) the *Times Picayune* at the time. "(Before Katrina) we would just have a couple hundred at most."

Since Katrina, the state has embarked on a scanning project to electronically archive all registration records statewide. LaPlace said they began on the coastal parishes and those were completed last year. She said they hope to complete the entire state by mid-2011.

The [tropics appear calm](#) at the moment and seem that they will remain that way throughout the remainder of early voting and election day.

"We are privy to weather information from our Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness so much earlier now than before and it helps us to plan," said Angie LaPlace, [commissioner of elections for Louisiana](#).

Still, that doesn't mean the state isn't prepared. According to LaPlace, Louisiana has emergency provisions in its election law that allows it to work with the governor to suspend or delay qualifying, early voting or elections if the secretary of state certifies to the governor that an emergency exists and the governor concurs and the qualifying, early voting and/or election can be resumed or rescheduled soon thereafter.

LaPlace said that there is no specific trigger—such as specific category of a hurricane—that would automatically cause the emergency provisions to go into effect.

"The Secretary works with the local election officials, the Clerk of Court and the Registrar of Voters, in making a decision to certify to the Governor that an emergency exists," LaPlace said. "There is no specific trigger per se because a tropical storm can be just as damaging or flood a building that is a polling place on election day, for example, as a hurricane."

## II. Election News This Week

- The bottom half of the alphabet held primaries this week as voters in Washington and Wyoming went to the polls, or in the case of Washington, to the mailbox. Don't think that just because Washington is largely vote-by-mail that there is no drama on election day. In [Snohomish County, Wash.](#), ballots for about 1,100 voters were not mailed until the day before the election. The county provided several options for those voters including faxed or e-mailed ballots, a voting machine at the local library, and several drop-off centers. Garth Fell, elections manager for Snohomish County, told *The Seattle Times* his office couldn't extend the voting deadline, even though the ballots were mailed late. "There's no provision in state law that allows us to change the election day or the deadline for returning ballots," he said. An Everett printer set aside the ballots because of mismatched bar codes. The ballots were supposed to be reprocessed, but were forgotten and not located until Monday. The [secretary of state's election website malfunctioned](#) for much of the night Tuesday. In a news release, Shane Hamlin said the computer server system was unable to keep up with the amount of data being sent from county election offices and the heavy volume of online traffic from visitors to the state election site. State Elections Director Nick Handy told *The Seattle Times* that including more than 13,000 precinct committee officer races added to the problem. "Access at times has been extremely slow and intermittent, or people have not been able to get into the system at all . . . We regret the inconvenience and will update as soon as possible." The site was back in working order about 10:30 p.m. Tuesday. In [Park County, Wyo.](#), deputy county clerk Wardi Reber anticipated a new practice of having election judges reconcile poll books every hour during the day would speed up final tallies when polls close at 7 p.m. "We're hoping that will speed up the process," Reber told the *Cody Enterprise*. "We were home by 10 p.m. in the 2008 primary." This year she hopes final election returns will be tallied by 9 p.m. Turnout ended up being so great that some precincts in the county did [run out of ballots](#) at one point.
- Primary news continues to trickle out of Tennessee two weeks after voters cast their ballots. In [Shelby County](#), the county election commission determined this week that human error and not a software glitch caused problems with the primary that temporarily prohibited people from voting. "It appears to the committee that in the crush of activities that occur between the closing of the early voting period and preparation for Election Day voting, computer analyst Dennis Boyce, an employee with an exemplary record, made a simple but significant error," the report says.

According to The Commercial Appeal, the report -- prepared by Election Commission members Robert D. Meyers, a Republican, and James H. Johnson, a Democrat -- is consistent with what the election commission leadership has said since Election Day. The [Rutherford County](#) Election Commission admitted this week that it broke the law by not holding early voting on a Saturday, July 17, but stands by its overall results. "We had a successful election," election commission Chairman Tom Walker told a local newspaper. "We will vigorously defend ourselves if someone challenges the election." The law required that the county have an early voting polling location open for three hours on the Saturday in question. Walker doubts this would have changed the outcome of any election. And the [Blount County](#) election commission determined this week that it would fix problems at the Rockford polling place. During the Aug. 5 election, Rockford voters, who are all supposed to vote in the 8th District, were presented ballots on the voting machine for the 20th District.

- West Virginia Secretary of State [Natalie Tennant is reviewing absentee voting rules](#) after a circuit judge [threw out more than 300 absentee ballots](#) in Lincoln County's primary election. Although she said 54 out of 55 counties had no trouble with absentee ballots, Tennant said she will meet with Carey and Kirkpatrick to talk about early voting rules and possible ways to make the regulations more clear to voters. "We can see where there can be confusion," she said. "All along we've said there are places in the code that are subject to interpretation." Tennant told the *Charleston Gazette* she would work with state lawmakers if necessary to change the language in state code concerning absentee voting.
- Questions continued to swirl around the [North Carolina State Board of Elections](#) office this week. On Tuesday, the *News & Observer* reported that at least four hometown friends of state Elections Director Gary Bartlett have been hired at the agency. According to the paper, collectively, they are known in the office as the "Goldsboro Mafia," a reference to their cozy relationship with the boss and to the car pool three of them and Bartlett shared between Goldsboro and state election headquarters in Raleigh. "They all got the jobs based on their own merit," said Bartlett, 56. "All of them have done a great job." Following the most recent report, [Gov. Bev Perdue](#) told the *Charlotte Observer* she is paying attention to reports of problems at the State Board of Elections, but she did not respond to calls from Republicans for her to press for the resignations of top officials at the agency. "The Board of Elections, like any board in North Carolina, has to be held to the highest standards of accountability and transparency," said Perdue. Asked whether she still had confidence in Gary Bartlett, the board's executive director, Perdue responded: "I have had confidence in the entire Board of Elections. I am reading the same articles you are reading, along with lots of other questions about pieces of state government, and I'm focused on providing solutions but also holding everyone accountable and high standards of transparency and zero tolerance."

### III. Opinions

National: [Overseas voting](#); [E-voting](#); [Manners at the polls](#)

Arizona: [August primary](#)

California: [Polling places](#)

Colorado: [Polling places](#); [Voting system](#); [Top-two primary](#)

Connecticut: [Poll workers](#); [August primary](#)

District of Columbia: [Election changes](#)

Florida: [Lee County](#); [Absentee voting, I](#)

Indiana: [Early voting](#)

Maryland: [Overseas voting](#); [Primary schedule](#)

Michigan: [August primary](#)

Minnesota: [Instant-runoff voting](#); [August primary](#)

North Carolina: [Overseas voting](#); [Election watchdogs](#); [State elections board, II, III, IV](#)

Ohio: [Department of Justice](#); [Absentee voting](#)

Oklahoma: [Runoff elections](#)

Tennessee: [Primary election](#); [City elections](#)

Utah: [Election fraud](#)

Washington: [Confusing ballots](#); [Top-two primary](#)

West Virginia: [Absentee voting](#)