

electionlineWeekly — October 09, 2008

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I. In Focus This Week

Wait a minute Mr. Postman, the ballot is in the mail

U.S. Postal Service expects more than 31 million mailed ballots

By [M. Mindy Moretti](#)

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It's not Christmas, or Valentine's Day or even Mother's Day, heck, it's not even equal to an average days mail, but Election Day 2008 is turning out to be quite an event for the U.S. Postal Service (USPS).

USPS announced in late September that it anticipates more than 31 million ballots will be mailed this election season. For an institution that purchases more rubber bands than any other entity in the world, Election Day 2008 might mean a few more bands of elastic, but the Postal Service is ready.

"On any given day, the Postal Service processes about 82 million cards and letters. Daily. The busiest mailing day of the year is always about six days before Christmas, and the volume is unprecedented: 275 million," said Joanne Veto, spokeswoman for the USPS. "So 31 million projected ballots over the course of the election season is certainly less than our daily amount and extremely manageable."

Twenty-eight states allow individuals to vote by mail via absentee ballot, without requiring an excuse or explanation; three additional states allow each county within the state to offer voting by mail as an option. In the state of Washington, 37 of its 39 counties are completely vote by mail. Oregon is the only state in the country that casts ballots exclusively by mail.

"Even in times of war, we have delivered the most fundamental symbol of democracy – a ballot. The Postal Service recognizes the important role mail plays in the election process," Pat Donahoe, deputy postmaster general and chief operating officer said in a [statement](#). "We're committed to providing voters with first-class service. Help us make sure your voice is heard and counted. Please mail early."

Although the USPS plays no role in how elections are carried out, it is authorized to inform and educate election officials about Postal Service products and services available. As mail voting began to blossom, the Postal Service created the [Mailing Resources Center for Election Officials](#) in 2005.

The Postal Service has Political Mail Coordinators, Absentee Ballot Coordinators and Mailpiece Design Analysts across the country (in almost each of the 80 geographic districts) that have met with election officials, party officials and candidates to help them understand postal mailing requirements and work with them on creating mail pieces.

"We've also worked very closely with the National Association of Secretaries of States and their members to provide information and guidelines for preparing absentee ballots and recommended mailing guidelines," Veto said.

"Deputy Postmaster General Pat Donahoe sent a letter to secretaries in July advising them on creating mailpieces, reminding them of the partnership between USPS and election officials, and offering continued support and assistance in designing election mail initiatives. A similar letter was sent to each of the 5,000 local election officials."

This year, the Postal Service completed dozens of training workshops for election officials. USPS has also presented workshops at various association meetings and conferences including the International

Association of Clerks, Recorders, Elections Officials and Treasurers and at The Election Center. In July, the Postal Service held a national webcast training session for election officials.

The Postal Service has done their part to education election officials on the ins and outs of conducting an election by mail, but that still leaves the electorate.

USPS requires postage on all mail. However, according to Veto, “[O]ur policy is to deliver all ballots placed in the mail stream. A ballot without the proper postage is delivered to the elections office to be opened and counted.” Ballots arrive at the elections office with postage due to the county or city conducting the election. The only time a ballot would be returned to a sender for insufficient funds would be if the county or city refuse acceptance.

According to Veto, the average absentee ballot costs \$.59 to mail and can vary from county to county within a state depending on local races and ballot initiatives. And postage prices can even vary within a county. In [Montgomery County, Ohio](#), some county residents will pay \$.59 to mail their ballots while others will pay \$.76.

In [Colorado](#), where more than one million voters have applied for their ballots by mail, county clerks began mailing the ballots late last week. This year’s ballot in Colorado is one of the longest in the history of the state and because of that, for example, postage will be \$1.17 for voters in Denver.

In Larimer County, Colo. — birthplace of the vote center — the county clerk’s office miscalculated the postage for absentee ballots and initially announced that they would only cost \$.42 to return.

“It has come to my attention this morning (Oct. 6) that the calculations determining the postage for returning a mail-in ballot by mail to our office were incorrect,” Larimer County Clerk and Recorder Scott Doyle [said](#). “While I am sorry that the postage amount was inaccurately announced initially, this correction has come early enough in the process to get the word out to voters in advance of their mailing back their ballots. This early catch also allows us to work with the post office prior to their receiving any returned ballots, to ensure all ballots are delivered to our office properly.”

Of course not all voters will be saddled with the cost of postage. Four states — Hawaii, Minnesota, Nevada and West Virginia — cover the cost of postage for ballots for absentee ballots. Members of the military stationed overseas and Americans living abroad may mail their ballots for free, if they are dropped off at a U.S. consulate office or APO/FPO Post Office.

However, most voters in America have to put one, sometimes two stamps on their ballot to ensure that it is properly mailed. And it doesn’t matter what combination of stamps are placed on the ballot either. The inclination of most Americans who need to put \$.59 or more on a ballot would probably be to place two \$.42 stamps on it and pop it in the mail.

“Any piece of mail with a stamp on it is delivered. Processing and delivery of the mail is not affected by the number of stamps on an envelope,” Veto said.

With all this in mind, USPS has asked voters in the U.S. to mail their completed ballots at least five days before they are due (due dates vary by jurisdiction) and has encouraged overseas voters to mail their ballot at least two weeks before November 4. Service members stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan should have already mailed their ballots.

Veto has one piece of advice for voters. Mail early.

“The earlier the better. The largest number of ballots being mailed happens the last two weeks in October, so if a voter can mail earlier in the month, we would recommend and encourage it,” Veto said. “And make sure the ballot is placed in the envelope properly -- make sure the address of the elections office is clearly visible in the window of the return envelope or printed visibly and clearly on the outside of the envelope.”

II. Election Reform News This Week

- A report released by *The New York Times* this week finds that tens of thousands of eligible voters in at least six swing states have been [removed from the rolls or have been blocked from registering](#) in ways that appear to violate federal law, according to a review of state records and Social Security data. The six swing states seem to be in violation of federal law in two ways. Michigan and Colorado are removing voters from the rolls within 90 days of a federal election, which is not allowed except when voters die, notify the authorities that they have moved out of state, or have been declared unfit to vote. Indiana, Nevada, North Carolina and Ohio seem to be improperly using Social Security data to verify registration applications for new voters. In addition to the six swing states, three more states appear to be violating federal law. Alabama and Georgia seem to be improperly using Social Security information to screen registration applications from new voters. And Louisiana appears to have removed thousands of voters after the federal deadline for taking such action.
- After a series of [problems](#) with Saturday's hurricane-postponed primary election, [Louisiana officials are proposing a shake up at the polls](#). Secretary of State Jay Dardenne told the *Times-Picayune* he asked Orleans Clerk of Criminal Court Arthur Morrell and the Orleans Parish Board of Elections "to attempt to identify those commissioners in charge at the problem precincts and to either replace them or redouble their efforts to make sure commissioners in charge realize the error of their ways." Such moves could cause more problems for a local election system struggling with a lack of qualified poll workers. Morrell wasn't willing to say the problems were significant, and he bristled at any suggestion that he fire commissioners. "Until I have my own investigation I'm not doing nothing," he told the paper. "As far as getting rid of commissioners in charge, I'm not getting rid of anyone unless I find out they did something intentionally or refuse to change their ways."
- The Council of the District of Columbia released a preliminary report on their findings into the Sept. 9 primary and found [that both Sequoia and the D.C. Board of Elections and Ethics are at fault](#). According to The Washington Post, the report, released yesterday, says Sequoia Voting Systems, a California-based firm, "was too quick to exonerate itself and the equipment used in the tabulation process. . . . To date, the evidence appears to indicate that there was a problem both in equipment (the server) and in the software." Also, the elections board failed to effectively communicate with the public about the mishap, the report says. The tabulation problems did not change the outcome of the election, and the board certified the results after counting by hand the votes in the problematic precinct. The board has not pinpointed what happened in the initial mix-up.
- Even the most prepared election official can't be prepared for everything and one would imagine that [Tulare County, Calif.](#) registrar of voters Rita Woodard was not prepared for the truck delivering absentee ballots to the county to get into an accident. The UPS truck carrying the ballot hydroplaned on wet pavement and one of trailers hauling ballots from the Washington-based printer broke open sending plastic wrapped pallets loaded with ballots on to the side of the road. All ballots damaged and not, will be returned to the printer where they will be sorted and new ballots will be printed to replace the damaged one. According *Press-Democrat*, the driver, who was not injured, informed the highway patrol of the sensitive nature of the cargo and all ballots have been accounted for. Absentee ballots which were supposed to go out on Monday will now go out at the end of the week.

III. Research and Report Summaries

Each week, *electionline* provides brief summaries of recent research and reports in the field of election administration. Please e-mail links to research to sgreene@electionline.org.

[The Primary Turnout Story: Presidential Races Miss Record High](#) - American University's Center for the Study of the American Electorate, Oct. 1, 2008

The 2008 presidential primary season saw record turnout in many states, but a deeper analysis of both presidential primaries and state primaries held this year finds that some elections saw record lows. At 30.3 percent, this year's presidential primary turnout of the eligible citizen electorate just missed the record high of 1972's 30.9 percent and 24 states had record turnout. However turnout in 21 states which held primaries on a different day than presidential primaries reached a record low at 14 percent.

[Are All Precincts Created Equal? The Prevalence of Low-Quality Precincts in Low-Income and Minority Communities](#) – By Matt A. Barreto, University of Washington, Seattle, Mara Cohen-Marks, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California and Nathan D. Woods, Welch Consulting, Inc., Washington, D.C., *Political Research Quarterly*, Sept. 22, 2008 (Subscription required)

The researchers examined the quality and accessibility of polling places in Los Angeles during the March 2004 primary. They found lower quality polling places - less visible, less stable, harder to find, and harder to navigate – were more common in low-income and minority neighborhoods than in high-income and predominantly white neighborhoods. This in turn depressed turnout in the lower quality polling places even after controlling for factors such as race and income. The authors suggest that while some recent research in other cities also demonstrates that precinct quality is a significant issue, additional research is needed to study what other barriers exist in polling places across the nation. (Subscription required)

[EAC Issues Four Quick Start Management Guides](#) – The Election Assistance Commission, October 2008

The federal Election Assistance Commission in its capacity to provide guidance to election administrators released four guides concerning different aspects of the election process. The topics include:

- [Serving Voters in Long Term Care Facilities](#)
- [Provisional Ballots](#)
- [Recounts and Canvassing](#)
- [Certifying an Election](#)

[Poll Worker Training: Is Your State Complying with the Law?](#) – Prepared by the Advancement Project, October 2008

Noting that poll worker training is often not uniform within states, the report makes several recommendations to improve the process including:

- Mandatory uniform programs throughout a state that also assess trainees when the sessions are complete;
- Hand-on training on the latest election technology;
- User-friendly training manuals;
- Training on determining voters correct polling locations;
- In-depth training on the use of provisional ballots; and
- More training on voting rights and rules regarding voter challenges

IV. Opinion This Week

National: [Vote fraud](#); [Foreclosures](#); [Voting system](#); [Voting rights, II](#)

Alabama: [Voter registration](#)

Alaska: [International elections](#)

Arizona: [Primary audit](#)

California: [Election Day](#); [Foreclosures](#)

Colorado: [Morgan County](#); [Voter registration](#)

Florida: [Election Day](#); [Vote-by-mail](#)

Georgia: [Early voting](#); [Vote count](#); [Voter ID](#)

Indiana: [Vote fraud](#)

Kansas: [Ballot design](#)
Kentucky: [Electioneering](#)
Louisiana: [Kinks at the polls](#)
Maine: [Early voting](#); [Audits](#)
Michigan: [Early voting](#)
New Jersey: [Early voting](#)
North Dakota: [Early voting](#)
Ohio: [Early voting](#); [Voter trust](#); [Paper ballots](#); [Election integrity](#); [Same-day registration](#); [Voting machines](#)
Pennsylvania: [Polling places](#), [II](#)
Tennessee: [Voting machines](#), [II](#); [Election integrity](#)
Virginia: [Touch-screen machines](#); [Ex-felon rights](#)
Washington: [Sam Reed](#); [King County](#), [II](#)
Wisconsin: [Voter registration](#); [Electronic voting machines](#)

***some sites require registration*

V. Available Grants

Fair Elections Projects 2008—Mitchell Kapor Foundation recognizes the importance of voting and the need to protect the utmost integrity of the electoral process. The foundation is interested in work which addresses the following categories: voter participation, with a focus on implementing nonpartisan strategies to improve voter education and registration; and election protection, with a focus on ensuring that every eligible voter can vote and that every ballot cast is counted. For the remainder of 2008, the foundation is only considering efforts that are national in scope. **Eligibility:** Nonprofit organization. **Deadline:** Open. **Funds:** \$1.3 million available to fund awards ranging from \$25,000 to \$50,000. **Web site:** www.mkf.org/votingaccess/index/html.

VI. Job Postings This Week

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

Chief Deputy — L.A. County Clerk and Recorder's Office, Los Angeles, Calif. The Chief Deputy Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk reports to the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, and acts as assistant head of the Department of the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk. This one position is distinguished by its executive and administrative responsibility for assisting the Registrar-Recorder/ County Clerk in the planning, organization, and direction of all operations of the Department including those of the County Clerk operations, Registrar operations, and Recorder operations. Minimum Requirements: Five years of progressively responsible experience in an administrative or management capacity directing or assisting in directing through subordinate managers, a major organizational unit with responsibility for multiple high profile functions or services, including elections administration and legal document processing or functions of a similar level of complexity. This experience may have been in either a public or private agency or businesses providing public services. **Salary:** \$129,045-\$195,320. **Application:** Submit statement of interest and resume to: Marco Morejon, Department of Human Resources, Executive Recruitment; Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration; 500 West Temple Street, Room 555; Los Angeles, CA 90012; Phone: (213) 974-2675; Fax: (213) 613-4773. E-mail: mmorejon@hr.lacounty.gov. [Web site](#). **Deadline:** Open.