

VOTING RECORD

The South Carolina General Assembly has passed a bill that will make it easier to know how lawmakers vote. The state was one of only a handful that does not require votes to be recorded. The new law requires roll call votes on second readings, on each section of the state budget, and when the House and Senate approve compromise legislation, according to South Carolina Radio Network. The change has been debated for three years.

A HAND TO VOTE

More than 30,000 servicemen and women in recent years have lost limbs or eyesight, or suffered traumatic brain injuries. Casting a private ballot while in a nursing facility, however, can be difficult. The Operation BRAVO Foundation, part of The Wounded Heroes Initiative, wants to improve voting technology and processes to support the voting rights of veterans seriously wounded in war. It is surveying states to determine what may be needed, including changes to some laws that restrict how, when and where citizens can vote. The foundation will provide recommendations in September.

PRESCHOOL PUNCH

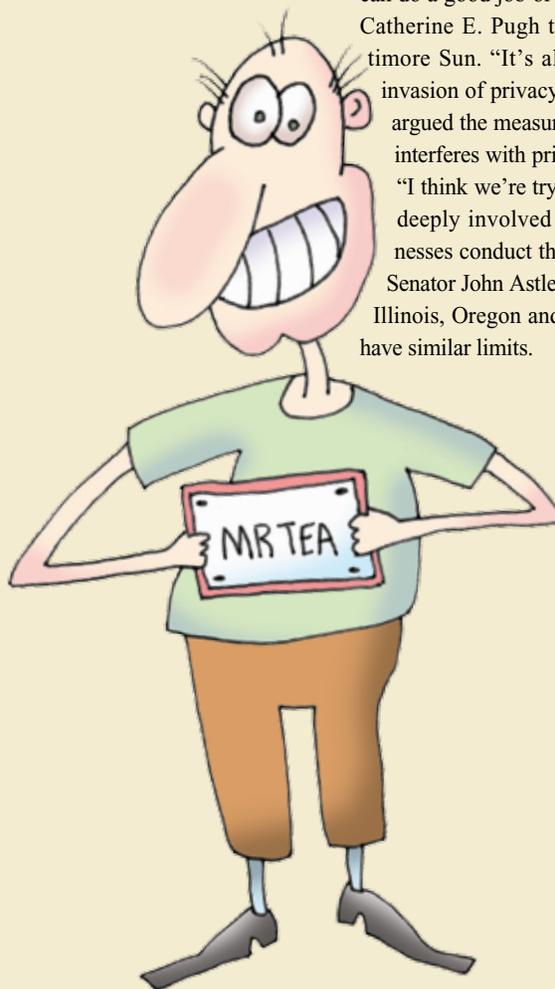
A new study by the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University found total state funding for early childhood education declined by \$30 million between 2009 and 2010. U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan told the Washington Post the cuts present “real challenges to young people who are desperately fighting to enter the mainstream.” Funding for K-12 education, however, increased slightly during the same period. The survey’s findings present questions about whether states can meet the federal government’s goals of increasing preschool quality and enrollments.

PROVE IT

Kansas became the 28th state to require voters to show identification at the polls. A photo ID will be required after Jan. 1, 2012, and proof of citizenship when registering will kick in starting in 2013. Kansas is one of 20 states so far this year to consider new voter ID requirements. Of the 27 states that already have voter ID laws, 13 have proposals to strengthen their requirements.

A CHECK ON CREDIT CHECKS

Maryland passed a law this session barring employers from using credit checks to deny hiring a job applicant or firing an employee. It does, however, allow companies to run credit reports for high-level positions and for jobs that involve handling sensitive data. Violators will be fined \$500 for a first offense and up to \$2,500 for repeated violations. “A credit report should not be the measure by which people are judged in terms of whether they can do a good job or not,” Senator Catherine E. Pugh told The Baltimore Sun. “It’s almost like an invasion of privacy.” Opponents argued the measure excessively interferes with private industry. “I think we’re trying to get too deeply involved in how businesses conduct their business,” Senator John Astle said. Hawaii, Illinois, Oregon and Washington have similar limits.



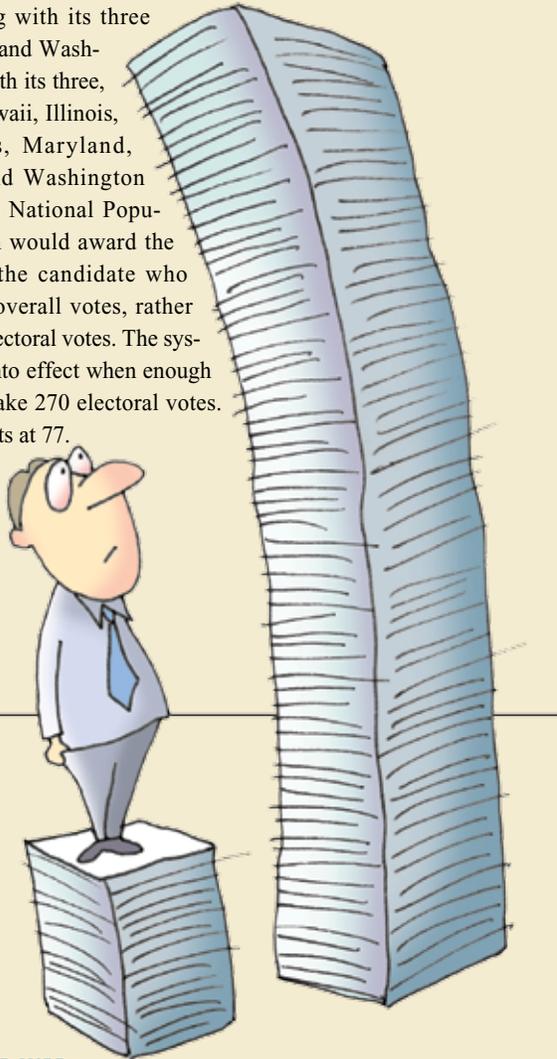
A LICENSE TO PARTY

Lawmakers in Arizona, Indiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New York and Virginia have considered bills this year to allow “Don’t Tread on Me” or Tea Party license plates. Nevada also has a bill to promote awareness of the U.S. Constitution with “an image of the coiled rattlesnake depicted on the Gadsden flag,” but the bill prohibits “any legend, motto or slogan.” The bills in Arizona and Virginia have passed. The others are in various stages of the legislative process. The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles allows for a specialty plate with the phrase “Don’t Tread on Me.”

SIX MORE

Vermont, along with its three electoral votes, and Washington, D.C., with its three, have joined Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey and Washington in adopting the National Popular Vote, which would award the presidency to the candidate who wins the most overall votes, rather than the most electoral votes. The system would go into effect when enough states join to make 270 electoral votes. The total now sits at 77.

100
ELECTORIAL
VOTES



FRAUD ATTACKS

The Atlantic Monthly recently ranked states based on the amount of fraud and identify theft complaints published by the Federal Trade Commission in the Consumer Sentinel Network Data Book. Consumers filed more than 1.3 million fraud claims in 2010. In the most fraud-ridden states, either residents do not adequately protect their own interests or the government does not do enough to prevent fraud and identify theft, according to the authors. The state with the largest percentage of total complaints per 100,000 people was Colorado, followed by Florida, Maryland, Nevada, Arizona, California, Washington, Delaware, Alaska and Georgia.

TUITION TUG-A-WAR

Maryland's legislature is the latest to pass a bill allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition. In Maryland, however, the rates apply only to community colleges. Eleven other states give undocumented students who meet specific requirements in-state tuition rates at all public postsecondary institutions. Lawmakers in California and Texas were the first to pass this kind of legislation in 2001. New York and Utah followed in 2002. Since then, Illinois, Kansas, New Mexico, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Washington and Wisconsin passed laws. Oklahoma, however, has since amended its law, leaving it up to the Board of Regents to decide who qualifies for in-state tuition rates. To be eligible, in most states, students must live in the state, have attended high school for one to three years, and sign an affidavit stating their intention to file for legal immigration status. Nine of the 11 states prohibit undocumented students from receiving state financial aid; New Mexico and Texas do not. This year, lawmakers in at least another 12 states—Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, Oregon and Rhode Island—have considered similar legislation to expand in-state tuition rates. So far, only the bills in Mississippi have failed. On the other hand, legislators in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Montana, New Jersey, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia have debated bills to ban undocumented students from receiving in-state tuition rates or from enrolling in public institutions. (Arizona, Colorado, Georgia and South Carolina already do so.) The bills in Indiana and Montana passed and have been sent to the governors. Indiana's bill restricts in-state tuition to "lawfully present" students, while Montana's bill would put a referendum on the 2012 ballot asking voters if the state should deny access to public colleges and financial aid to illegal immigrants. Also, lawmakers in California, Kansas, Nebraska, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin have introduced bills to repeal existing laws that grant in-state tuition to undocumented students. At press time, only Oklahoma's bill had passed both chambers and was awaiting reconciliation.

TEST TYRANNY

Lawmakers, looking for savings everywhere, are starting to question the value of all those expensive standardized tests we require of our school children. The Colorado General Assembly recently joined a growing number of states that are considering dropping statewide testing beyond that required by the federal government. It requires reading and math tests in grades three through eight and one in high school. "We're so significantly over-testing that everyone feels this is something we want to look at," Colorado Representative Tom Massey told the Associated Press. Administering annual tests in that state costs around \$20 million.