



## Elections and the Economy

As states enter a fourth year of economic distress, elections are being viewed through a fiscal lens in a way that has rarely been true before, and legislators are proposing changes.

- Montana legislators will consider moving to an all-mail voting system, which the secretary of state says will save \$2 million.
- California and New Jersey have bills to abandon presidential primaries.
- A bill in Oklahoma would require political parties to pay for presidential primaries.
- Minnesota and Missouri have legislative proposals to reduce the threshold for a government-funded recount.



Another target: costly special elections. Louisiana and San Francisco saved money when the secretary of state and mayor, respectively, delayed their resignations, avoiding the need for special elections altogether.

Measuring the real costs of elections is difficult. Doug Lewis, director of the Election Center, says that "... no such information exists. There has not been a 'cost accounting' approach to figuring this out." (The Election Center's "Elections in Crisis: Rethinking How to Serve and Survive" meeting in February will address financial questions, among others.)

Although resources are limited, five are discussed below.

1. The Election Center has an eight-page "Checklist: Cost of Elections" for elections administrators. It gives a sense of what can (or should) be counted.
2. *Re-Counting the Vote: What Does It Cost?* published in October 2010 by the Pew Center on the States, gives a detailed look at the cost of two recounts. It reports that the manual recount in the 2004 Washington governor's race cost state and local governments \$900,000, or an average of 31 cents per ballot. By comparison, the recount cost in the 2008 Minnesota U.S. Senate race, was "just" \$460,000, or an average of 16 cents per ballot. Why the difference? Labor. Minnesota used temporary, low-wage workers, whereas Washington paid its permanent staff overtime. Decisions about security, facilities, procedures and other factors played a role as well.

Of course, avoiding a recount is the most economical option. At least 18 states have a defined threshold (usually when the margin between the candidates is less than a specified percentage of the total votes cast) that triggers an automatic, state-funded recount. A few states set the trigger at 1.0 percent, and Washington and Minnesota (along with Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida and North Dakota) set it at 0.5 percent. Arizona is at the low end, with a 0.1 percent threshold. See NCSL's webpage, Automatic Recount Thresholds, for state requirements.

*continued on page 2*

### can•vass (n.)

Compilation of election returns and validation of the outcome that forms the basis of the official results by a political subdivision.

—U.S. Election Assistance Commission:  
*Glossary of Key Election Terminology*

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Missouri Representative Tony Dugger, a former county clerk and now chair of the Committee on Elections, has introduced a bill to decrease his state's threshold to 0.5 percent. He says that Missouri's county clerks want the change: "With the accuracy of equipment now, there's less chance of error. With the cost of recounts, they felt it was time to lower the threshold."

3. Colorado's Best Practices and Vision Commission funded a report, *Changing the Way Colorado Votes: A Study of Selected Reforms*, on the cost of all-mail elections and other questions to be released in early February. Co-authors Peggy Cuciti and Allan Wallis of the University of Colorado-Denver's Buechner Institute for Governance carried out a two-part study. The first results came from a survey of county elections officials, political party chairs and election activists on their predictions of what would happen if the state were to adopt all-mail elections. More than 80 percent of county clerks and a majority of the others

### The Cost of Voter ID Requirements

At least 16 states are now considering additional requirements for voter identification. Part of the legislative calculus is the cost of requiring (or requesting) photo IDs. The Supreme Court's ruling in *Crawford vs. Marion County* (2008) effectively requires states that ask for photo IDs to provide them at no cost for citizens who don't already have one. That begs the question: What is the cost to the states for doing so?

There are few solid answers so far. However, Indiana, one of two states that absolutely requires a photo ID (if not at the polls, then shortly after Election Day) has done a quick estimate of its costs since implementation. In 2010, 168,264 IDs were provided. The materials-only cost for those cards was \$333,162. "Total production costs, including man-power, transaction time and manufacturing" was measured at \$1,309,093, according to information supplied by Indiana's Election Division. In addition, a "revenue loss" to Indiana of \$2,187,432 (based on \$13 per card) also could be considered. 


believe that a switch would result in reduced costs. Most clerks also believe turnout would increase, errors in election administration would be less likely, and fraud would not increase. Party chairs and election activists were more likely than the clerks to express concern about effects on various measures related to election integrity.

The second part of the study analyzes actual general election costs and includes estimates of costs for the same election had it been conducted by mail. It also compares costs between counties that conducted exclusively mail-based primary elections with similar counties that did not. (Colorado law does not allow all-mail general elections.) The results will be finalized shortly.

In the meantime, author Cuciti says, "I do think all-mail elections are going to turn out to be cheaper. However, the potential for savings depends on how the elections would otherwise be conducted."

4. The District of Columbia's Board of Elections studied the cost of several options for its April 2011 special election. A stripped-down version of a "regular" precinct-based election was priced at \$829,000. A mail-only election option came in at a surprising \$1.6 million. Doubling up precincts was projected to save only \$50,000, largely because a mailing explaining the switch would be required. The least expensive option was a "vote center" election, with two centers in each of the eight wards, all open for three days of voting. The District has chosen to look for additional funding so it can run a "normal," 143-precinct election. The report is specific to the District and is not intended to provide cost comparisons for other jurisdictions.

5. *The Real Cost of Voter Registration*, a report funded by the Pew Center on the States and updated in March 2010, shows that each registration-related transaction in Oregon (entering a new registration or updating an existing one) costs \$7.67 each, for a total in 2008 of \$8.8 million. The key finding was that modernizing registration can provide serious savings; by going to a paperless system, Oregon could save \$200,000 in printing and production costs alone. By moving to modern databases, errors (and the cost of correcting them) are reduced.

We can expect more attempts to price out voting options in the future—and they can't come soon enough for decision makers. While the cost of elections is still tiny when compared with the costs of health care, education, criminal justice, or transportation, every million matters. 

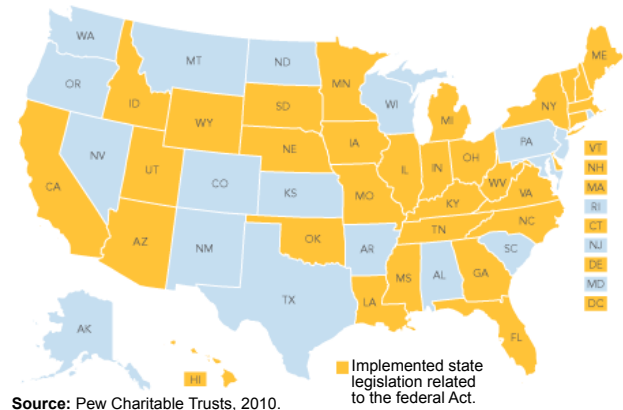
## Who's Complying with MOVE?

The MOVE Act of 2009 was supposed to make it easier for military personnel and Americans living abroad to vote in state-run elections. The most prominent requirement is that ballots headed abroad be transmitted at least 45 days before Election Day. So far, says Kieran Marion, counsel to the Uniform Law Commission, many states have not yet fully complied with the law. *Moving Toward a Better Election System for Military and Overseas Voters*, published in December 2010 and funded by the Pew Center on the States, says that only 32 states enacted legislation that address some or all of the MOVE requirements.


To make it easier for states to comply with MOVE, the Uniform Law Commission approved model legislation, the "Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act," or UMOVA. Marion expects at least 18 states to introduce it in 2011. Adoption of UMOVA will, he says, "move us a long way toward fully and effectively enfranchising our military personnel and overseas civilians."

Paddy McGuire, a deputy director at the Federal Voting Assistance Program, says that "the beauty of UMOVA is that it rectifies all federal elections and applies the MOVE Act protection to state and local elections, too."

States MOVE to Improve  
Thirty-two states and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation in response to the federal MOVE Act.



McGuire's office has a scoring system to indicate the degree that states have accommodated overseas and military voters. States that adopt UMOVA will automatically get a score of 89.5, far above 75, which the program set as acceptable. Delaware is currently the top scorer, with a 100.

The Overseas Vote Foundation will hold its fifth annual UOCAVA Summit 2011, February 10, at the Pew Charitable Trusts in Washington, D.C. 




*Polling board members in Arlington, Va., demonstrate touch screen voting machines to Rita Suessmuth, head of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission for the Nov. 2, 2004, U.S. elections. (Photo credit: OSCE/Michaela Kuefner)*

## Election Observers

Everyone who's reading this is an "election observer" in one way or another. But not everyone has had the chance to be an official election observer at a local polling place in the United States, much less in an international setting. The Helsinki Commission, made up of members of Congress, and its partner, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), are changing that, one election at a time, both here and abroad.

According to the OSCE, 49 states (Connecticut is the exception) permit partisan election observers, and 43 states allow nonpartisan observers. But as of January 2010, only South Dakota and Missouri, plus the District of Columbia, explicitly permit international observers. And yet, when international observers have come to the United States and spent time at the polls with election administrators, the response from both sides has been overwhelmingly positive, according to the commission.

The National Association of Secretaries of State recently adopted a resolution to encourage international observers here at home, providing sort of a "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" for the concept.

Neil Simon, communications director for the OSCE, which manages most international election teams, says that legislators, legislative staff and election administrators are especially desirable as observers abroad. (NCSL has created a 5-minute video interview with Simon about international observers.) He's also the point person on model state legislation (in short and long versions) to permit international observers. Legislation can be comprehensive, or it can be as simple as inserting the phrase, "and international observers," into existing statutes. 

## Worth Noting

- As of January 26, 44 state legislatures were in session, and 947 elections-related bills have been introduced. We can expect close to 2,000 by the end of the year. Voter ID requirements are the hottest topic, but primaries also are getting attention. Already, three states are considering changing the dates for presidential primaries, and six may change the dates for state primaries. Twelve states—an unusually high number—are considering changing the type of primary they operate (open versus closed). For more data and analysis of this kind, check NCSL's latest Legislative Action Bulletin.
- NCSL has launched a new database for election-related bills for 2011, and it is available for use by all legislators, staff, and other election observers. Powered by State Net, the database captures all introduced legislation in the 50 capitols that deal with elections. This 2011 database builds on the existing 2001-2010 elections database NCSL has always maintained. The older database remains available for historical research. Please try these out.
- The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has \$9 million in grants available to states; \$2 million is available for voting system testing and post-election audits, with a Feb. 15 deadline, and \$7 million is available for research and development on voting accessibility technology for people with disabilities, with a March 1 deadline.
- New from NCSL: A topical index of past *Canvass* articles. From all-mail elections to voter verification, these short articles may be useful in crafting legislation.

## From NCSL's Election Team

As we focused on the economics of elections this month, we tried to gather all the fact-based research we could. I'm sure we didn't get it all, so please send any reports or analyses you can on election costs so that we can share more next month.

And, please know that we're here to field legislators' and staff questions from left field, right field or even from out of the park.

We'll be in Washington, D.C., for NCSL's Spring Forum on April 14 and 15. The Elections and Redistricting Committee will have a few sessions designed just for the states' election gurus. Perhaps we'll see you there.

As always, comments are welcome.

—From Jennie Drage Bowser, Tim Storey  
and Wendy Underhill

## And Worth Quoting

"If 99.9 percent of the population has never had any trouble exercising their right to vote, how much time and money should be spent on writing law and policy so that the last 0.1 percent is afforded the opportunity?"  
—*From an anonymous response to The Canvass via e-mail.*

"If you don't understand what you're voting for, the right to vote doesn't mean anything."  
—*Natalie Landreth, a staff attorney with the Native American Rights Fund, commenting on settlement of a voting rights suit by the Yup'ik-speaking Alaska Natives.*

"...we have never found any evidence to support allegations of organized, large-scale vote fraud or dissuasion. Before we ... alter existing access to voting we should make sure we do it for a compelling reason based on a clear need."  
—*Milwaukee County District Attorney John Chisholm, a Democrat, in a letter to the Wisconsin Senate Transportation and Elections Committee, which is considering strict Voter ID legislation.*

"...it is easy for those willing to lie to commit voter fraud and difficult for poll workers, law enforcement and prosecutors to detect irregularities. A photographic identification rule will have a strong deterrent effect on voter fraud, while imposing minimal burdens on voters."  
—*Testimony by Wisconsin Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen on the same legislative proposal.*

### THE CANVASS

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