

Blogs provide voters access to candidates

Can increase interaction, discussion

BY STEPHANIE METZEN
STAFF WRITER

Internet blogging has widely impacted politics across the country, revolutionizing the field the way TV did 30 years ago, and the effects can be seen in N.C. races.

Blogs have become a way for candidates to get more immediate and diverse feedback from voters. They also enable grassroots candidates to broadcast their messages.

Ryan Teague Beckwith, moderator for The (Raleigh) News & Observer's political blog Under the Dome, said political blogging allows readers greater input in the electoral process.

When Beckwith posted about a press conference that he was attending for Republican gubernatorial candidate Bob Orr, a reader immediately responded with a question. Beckwith was able to ask Orr the question, one he said he never would have thought to ask.

Reporters aren't the only ones taking advantage of the opportunity to directly interact with voters.

Hillary Clinton's campaign started NCAskMe.com, a blog that allows North Carolinians to submit ques-

tions. So far more than 11,000 have been submitted. Some of the entries have been turned into TV ads.

Demonstrating blogs' potential to build trust between candidates and voters, Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate Jim Neal confirmed that he is gay during an online chat on BlueNC.com.

BlueNC.com, a blog aimed at progressive Southern Democrats, features views from both parties.

Front-page blogger Betsy Muse said some BlueNC bloggers find in the site a community where they can express themselves freely despite living in Republican-dominated areas. The Republicans within the BlueNC blogging community broaden the spectrum of viewpoints on the issues, she added.

"Some Republicans who hang around speak from a different perspective," she said. "I think there is tremendous value in that. The value is that no one viewpoint is the right viewpoint."

Candidates use blogs to publicize their views and policies, not just as a means of listening to voters.

Justin Thibault, a blogger for Cabarrus Cheap Seats, said his community-based blog allows local candidates to save money by providing a forum for reaching community members.

"We are getting through that echo chamber; we are getting unique content."

JUSTIN THIBAULT, BLOGGER

He said blogging allows politicians to relate to people more personally by publishing in-depth reports about policies to which constituents can respond, as opposed to an earlier age when politicians just shook hands and kissed babies.

For politicians with warm personalities, Thibault said, blogging can be intimidating.

Seasoned politicians, who often rely on personal interaction, may be uncomfortable with the shift in voter attention that comes when blogs provide access to detailed public policy.

Thibault said one limitation is that people seek out sites featuring similar interests and political views.

But he said that opportunities to read about dissimilar views are available and that people can decide for themselves what they read.

"We are getting through that echo chamber; we are getting unique content," he said.

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

National and World News

FROM THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

McCain speaks to overlooked voters

SELMA, Ala. (AP) — Seeking support in rural Alabama, Republican presidential candidate John McCain said Monday he knows it will be difficult to win over black voters who have supported Democrats for generations.

"I am aware the African-American vote has been very small in favor of the Republican Party," McCain told reporters.

McCain delivered a speech as he embarked on a weeklong tour of places that suffer from poverty and inattention.

Penn. votes might differ by region

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Older, whiter and more female than the nation as a whole, Pennsylvania looks like Hillary Rodham Clinton country. Wealthier, better educated and more African American than the rest of the state, Pennsylvania's thickly settled southeast corner could belong to Barack Obama.

Pennsylvania's primary Tuesday could be decisive, or it could extend a campaign that has lasted longer than most ever imagined.

Carter, Hamas discuss Israel but are unable to agree on a plan for peace

JERUSALEM (AP) — Former President Carter said Monday that the Islamic group Hamas was willing to accept the Jewish state as a "neighbor next door," but the militants did not match their upbeat words with concrete steps to halt violence.

Hamas, which advocates Israel's destruction, instead recycled previous offers, including a 10-year truce if Israel takes the unlikely step of withdrawing from the West Bank and Jerusalem first.

"I did the best I could," Carter said of his conversation with

Hamas supreme leader, Khaled Mashaal, pressing him to declare a one-month truce. "They turned me down, and I think they're wrong."

Over the weekend, Carter met twice with Hamas' five-member politburo. Carter said he won a written pledge from Hamas to accept any peace deal with Israel, as long as it's approved in a Palestinian referendum.

Carter said Hamas leaders told him they're also ready to accept the Jewish state's right to "live as a neighbor next door in peace" one day.

Execution dates reset after ruling

HOUSTON (AP) — Prosecutors moved quickly Monday to set new execution dates for three death-row inmates, hours after the Supreme Court lifted a reprieve it granted last fall so it could consider the constitutionality of lethal injection.

The justices' last-minute orders temporarily sparing the three inmates automatically expired when the justices denied their appeals Monday.

Several other death row inmates also lost their appeals Monday, but they had not been facing imminent execution.

Iraqi leader asks neighbors for help

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq's prime minister appealed Monday for support from his Arab neighbors, urging them to open embassies and forgive Iraqi debts as his government tries to crack down on Shiite militias in a crucial power struggle.

But the government plea came as militia leaders warned more violence could await.

Sunni Arabs have a strong stake in keeping Iraq — which is majority Shiite — firmly in the Arab orbit as a buffer against expanding influence by Iran, the largest Shiite nation.

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