



The Voter & the Internet: What Would George Washington Say!?

By Veronica C. Valero, written (& updated) for Golden Gate Computer Society Newsletter

If our Founding Fathers and Mothers were alive today, I wonder if they would be encouraged or in shock at what has happened to our freedom to vote. Would they be as overwhelmed as I am when I receive my voter packet? Not to mention all those tons of mailers the trees died for! I'm not sure which is more difficult to vote for: a person or a proposition. Was it this hard 200 years ago? Well, 200 years ago it wouldn't have been hard for me because I wouldn't have had the right to vote!

I am grateful for democracy, I do love our country, and I do take my responsibility to vote seriously. But, I must admit, sometimes when I go to the voting poll, I don't always vote on all the issues or for all the candidates. Why? Because, I didn't have time to do my homework to discern what would be the best choice! But, with the internet, it is becoming much easier to be better informed.

NONPARTISAN HELP

Marin County Register of Voters: (www.MarinVotes.org) This website lists all candidates, propositions and measures: both past and present. It also includes voter registration information and how to switch parties. Don't want to wait until the next morning to read about the results? On election night, go to the "Election Results" tab to watch the actual counting take place.

League of Women Voters: To know what candidates, propositions, and measures, you'll be voting on in your district, go to www.SmartVoter.org, type in your street address and zip code, and then you'll be given a list of the candidates, propositions and measures that you'll be voting for. It includes links with additional information on candidates and issues.

The Easy Voter Guide: Another nonpartisan quick guide to statewide elections is www.EasyVoter.org. This online guide includes links to State and Federal elections and the candidates' websites.

WATCHING INCUMBENT CANDIDATES

The best way to get to know incumbents is to watch them in action. If you cannot attend the State Assembly, State Senate, or Board of Supervisors meetings you can watch them LIVE on your computer on the Internet. This is called "webcasting," "streamed video," or "video streaming." You can also watch archived meetings at a later date. Here's an example of how you can use this tool with our own County of Marin Board of Supervisors.

Watching a Webcast:

1. Open the browser of choice on your computer (Internet Explorer, Firefox, etc.).
2. Type www.co.marin.ca.us in the address bar at the top, then press the Enter key or the "Go" button.
3. Click on the "Board of Supervisors" link on the navigation pane found on the left side.
4. Then, click on "Live Video Broadcast." It will take a minute or two to download. Enjoy!

Watch an Archived Webcast:

1. Follow steps #1-3 Above, then click on "Meeting Archive" located at the top of the page.
2. Locate the date of the meeting you want to view.
3. Click on the "Video" link.
4. A window will pop up and the video will stream to your computer. It takes a few minutes.
5. Start watching from the beginning. The volume control, pause, forward, and reverse buttons are under the video. And, on the right side is the agenda. You can scroll down to a specific item and click on one of the blue underlined hyperlinks to see the supportive documents in a readable PDF format!
6. Or, skip ahead to see a specific agenda item by using the drop-down menu under the video that says "Jump to" and select the specific agenda item.



NOTE: Novato is the only city in Marin county that also webcasts its council meetings: www.cityofnovato.org.

ABOUT STATE CANDIDATES

If your candidates are incumbents or have held other state public offices, you can go to www.legislature.ca.gov and find them on the State Senators and State Assembly Members web pages. Legislators feature the bills they authored, their issues, and their successes. This website also includes a link to www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html which allows you to type in a name of a legislator for current or past years to see what bill s/he authored. You can also learn how they voted on specific bills. You can also watch webcasts of “live” sessions or view the archives.

For those running against the incumbents who have not held an elected position, go to www.google.com and type in their name, city or state. In addition to their website, you will find letters-to-the-editor they may have written, board positions they may have held, as well as a wealth of other information.

STATE PROPOSITIONS

Did you accidentally toss out your voter guide with all those mailers? No worries: Get the official California election voter guide put out by the Secretary of State at: www.voterguide.sos.ca.gov.

VISIT THE WHITE HOUSE

Go to www.whitehouse.gov and learn more about our current president, past presidents, and current legislators. The marriage of the *Freedom Information Act* and the Internet also has allowed us to access State and Federal government records in comfort of our own home: How did your senators vote on issues? Go to www.senate.gov and learn about their records and positions.

Wikipedia at www.wikipedia.org can offer supplemental information about legislators and civic leaders, present and past. To take a break from reading, go to www.YouTube.com and typing in a legislator’s or candidate’s name. You’ll get to watch their speeches and hear other opinions. You can also goggle your legislators’ names or those running against them to find their websites and to learn what others think about them. But, just because it is written or on the Internet does not mean it is true—be fair and do more research.

AFTER THE ELECTION

Not only does your vote count, so does your voice! Don't forget to drop your local, state, and federal representatives an email or two letting them know about issues your are concerned about. Being a participating citizen has never been so easy. Now, go out and make a difference!

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