

# Advent of Internet voting has all eyes on Michigan

Michigan will serve as the test case for online voting and if successful could mean a new age of politics

By Colleen McCain Nelson  
The Dallas Morning News (KRT)

DALLAS — Michigan's caucus is the next in a long line of tests for the presidential candidates and this year's first test of virtual voting.

With the click of a mouse, Democrats can cast their ballots online in the only state using Internet voting this year.

More than 21,000 people have logged in to vote. State party officials predict the Internet option will help reverse a decline in voter turnout.

Officials expect a total turnout of about 300,000.

"Since it's been so difficult to get voters to the polling places, we decided to take the polling places to the voters," said Mark Brewer, executive chairman of the Michigan Democratic Party.

About 123,000 Democrats submitted applications that would allow them to vote online or by mail. During the final hours before Saturday's deadline, the party received an

average of one application per second, Brewer said.

"People have really embraced this," he said. "It has generated enormous energy."

Not everyone was enthused. Some of the candidates tried to block Internet voting, with Rev. Al Sharpton deeming it a high-tech poll tax.

Phil Noble, founder of PoliticsOnline, said candidates across the country have been wary of Internet voting.

"The barriers to online voting are not technical but are political," he said. "We have a whole group of people called politicians who say, 'Wait a minute. I don't want to change the rules.'"

Brewer emphasized the Internet was a supplemental option. All of the traditional venues are still available to voters.

"This was never exclusively an Internet voting system — that would be discriminatory," he said.

The state party has identified 2,500 places throughout the state, such as public libraries, where online access is free and open to the public.

Several countries use virtual voting, but the United States has been slow to embrace the concept, Noble said.

Security concerns are often cited as the primary reason for resistance to

high-tech voting. Thursday, the Pentagon scrapped plans to allow U.S. citizens overseas to vote online, saying the system was vulnerable to hackers, according to The Associated Press.

But Noble said the technology exists to ensure security.

"The international banking community for years has known how to move gazillions of dollars around the world," he said. "I think we can figure out how to get my vote down to the courthouse."

Thad Hall, co-author of the book "Point, Click, and Vote: The Future of Internet Voting," said the transition to online voting should be gradual, allowing governments and political parties to identify problems and work out any kinks in the system.

As the Internet generation comes of age, more voters will demand online voting, he said.

For now, Michigan is a good start and a useful test case, Hall said.

"The Michigan trial is going to go off and no one will have stolen the election," he said. "Now, if Dennis Kucinich wins, we'll know that there was a problem."

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# Despite major investigations, Halliburton is trading high

The embattled company has received a share high even though four federal inquiries are undetermined

By Jim Landers  
The Dallas Morning News (KRT)

WASHINGTON — Halliburton Co.'s troubles with auditors and investigations continue to pile up, but the company's shares are trading near a 30-month high.

"I think what you have here is the most heavily scrutinized government contractor in recent history," said UBS analyst James Stone.

That's the company's message too, with a television ad released Thursday touting its work in Iraq.

"We're serving the troops because of what we know, not who we know," said David Lesar, Halliburton's chairman and chief executive, in the ad.

Scrutiny of Halliburton's political connections stems from Vice President Dick Cheney's tenure as chief executive from 1995 to 2000.

"They get unfairly maligned simply because of their past association with me," Cheney said in a recent radio interview.

Wall Street continues to favor Halliburton. Its shares reached a 52-week high of \$30.68 a share on Tuesday and closed Thursday at \$29.40, off 70 cents.

Still, three federal agencies are

probing Halliburton matters that took place during Cheney's tenure. So far, none of the investigations has led to action against the company or the suggestion of wrongdoing on Cheney's part.

The Securities and Exchange Commission is investigating why Halliburton didn't tell investors of a change in accounting practices that counted cost overruns as revenues beginning in 1998.

The Treasury Department is looking at its deals in Iran.

The Justice Department is checking whether the company had a role in helping Nigerians for a big natural gas project. Halliburton said it did nothing wrong in the accounting switch and sales to Iran. The company has hired outside counsel to look into the allegations about Nigeria.

Halliburton inherited the Nigerian project in 1998 when it merged with Dresser Industries. Only one of the payments under scrutiny took place on Cheney's watch.

Four other investigations for bribes, kickbacks and overcharges involve incidents that took place after Cheney left the company. Most involve Halliburton contracts supporting the U.S. military and rebuilding Iraq.

Halliburton warned in an SEC filing it's received so much attention because of its past association with Cheney. Neither company officials nor Cheney's office responded Thursday to requests for comment.

Democratic presidential candidates have been hammering the company.

"Halliburton is guilty of shameful war-profiteering, and they need to be held accountable," Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry said in December.

The Army Corps of Engineers said Halliburton paid a fair price for the Kuwaiti gasoline, but the Defense Contract Audit Agency referred the matter to the Pentagon's inspector general and asked for a criminal investigation.

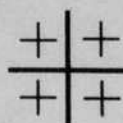
On Jan. 23, Halliburton reported it was returning \$6.3 million to the Defense Department after discovering overcharges by a Kuwaiti subcontractor, some of which made its way back to Halliburton employees.

This week, The Wall Street Journal reported the Pentagon was investigating Halliburton over millions of dollars in food service charges billed by a Saudi subcontractor for meals nobody ate. The Pentagon said Tuesday that Halliburton reimbursed the government for overcharges.

Pentagon comptroller Dov Zakheim was sympathetic in describing Halliburton's problems Wednesday before the Senate Armed Services Committee, saying auditors were finding the problems centered on Halliburton's subcontractors.

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