



Divided We Fall

State's Voter ID site may be somewhat misleading, but it's a useful resource for voters with questions

The Republicans recently shut down the federal government for more than two weeks and nearly forced the nation to default on its debt. The rollout of HealthCare.gov, the online portal for the Democrats' signature health care overhaul, has been an embarrassing debacle.



KEVIN O'NEILL
InSites

Government at the national and state level is sharply divided and dysfunctional. Public opinion of Congress is abysmal, and the president isn't fairing much better. People think politicians are incompetent, idiotic and corrupt.

Faith and trust in government have eroded. I recently had lunch with a group of highly educated, intelligent college professors. Their views on government ranged from apathy to disgust to the belief that unseen powers actually run the country, forcing elected officials to do their bidding.

The good news is that Tuesday is Election Day. As messed up as our system is, we live in a country where the people get to regularly

vote for their representatives, and the candidates with the most votes get elected. That's not the way it is in much of the world.

The Pennsylvania Department of State has created a website, **VotesPA.com**, to help voters navigate the voting process. Elections are our chance to right the wrongs in government.

Government of the people

Granted, Tuesday's election is not going to clean up Washington since it's a local election, but even state and local politics have their fair share of shenanigans.

In fact, Pennsylvania's Voter ID law has been embroiled in controversy since it was passed without any Democratic support in March 2012. The law was pushed by Republicans as a way to combat virtually nonexistent voter fraud, while derided by Democrats as a thinly disguised attempt to disenfranchise groups likely to vote Democratic. Currently, the law is tied up in a court battle and won't be in effect for this election.

VotesPA was created as a result of the Voter ID law. Critics of the site call it part of a propaganda campaign designed to mislead voters into thinking they need to show identification to vote. While the site states in numerous places that you do not have to show ID to

vote, the emphasis is clearly on encouraging people to show ID. There's a video of "voters" — it's funny how so many Pennsylvania voters look like models — flashing their picture IDs. The home page features a large picture of a hand displaying a driver's license. The phrase "Voter ID" is prominent throughout the site, and there is a good deal of copy explaining the various types of ID and how to get them. It's also curious that the URL ends with .com, which is the designation for a commercial site, while most every other state government website ends with .state.pa.us.

By the people

While the site seems biased in favor of the Voter ID law, it also has a lot of useful information for new voters, people who may be voting in a new place, by a new method or under different circumstances.

At the top of the site is a red box with the phrase "I am..." positioned over a drop-down menu. The menu lists various situations potential voters may be in, such as college student, convicted felon, military, overseas civilian and more. Selecting an item from the menu takes you to a page that explains your rights and how to cast your vote.

There are four tabs below the

box that direct you to other areas of the site. The first tab, Voting & Elections, has a drop-down menu with links to information on voting rights, where to vote, important dates, types of ballots, types of elections and more.

For the people

The Register to Vote tab has a drop-down menu with info on how, where and when to register. The Election Complaints tab takes you to a form on the Pennsylvania Department of State's regular website. The Resource Center tab takes you to a page of forms, lists and information sheets that can be downloaded.

VotesPA is also on Twitter and Facebook, which can be accessed via prominent links on the site. There's also a link to a Google map-based search function for polling places.

Propaganda or not, VotesPA is a slickly designed, informative site. You could argue that all of its features should be part of the regular state department site, but it definitely has higher visibility by being part of the Voter ID push. And maybe if more people know about it, more people will vote. That's a good thing.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.