

# Getting out the vote a big job

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Jake Bacon/Arizona Daily Sun Snow and mist swirl as the eight mile trail into Havasupai disappears into the gloom just after dawn Tuesday morning. Coconino County election monitor Bill Towler hiked in Sunday and hiked back out with the election ballots after the polls closed Tuesday night. To order this photo, go to <http://photos.azdailysun.com>

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area at the western end of the Grand Canyon. For the roughly 500 residents who live in the village, there are only three ways in or out. The first is on foot -- the guidebooks call for a three- to six-hour hike. Next is to ride either a mule or a horse. And finally there is helicopter service to the village twice a week.

For Bill Towler, whose responsibility it is to run the voting precinct in the village, the choice was an obvious one: he would hike. Towler, the community development director for Coconino County, has been running the precinct since the September 2000 election. That means this is the fifth time he has hiked into the canyon to set up the polling station.

For Towler, the hike in and the work of setting up and monitoring the polling station is all just the preamble for what happens after the polls close.

"The way it started was the challenge of getting the ballots in (to the elections office in Flagstaff) the same night and not only that but to get them in before the rest of the ballots are in from the other precincts." Towler said.

As soon as the polls close at 7 p.m. Towler packs the ballots into a small day pack, grabs a flashlight and heads for the trail.

His goal is to hike the eight miles out of the canyon in the dark in less than 2 1/2 hours, get in his truck and drive the 160 miles back to election headquarters in Flagstaff before midnight.

As ravens wheel in the sky over the cliffs above, a 75-foot limit sign sits in the red sand courtyard as a superfluous warning to candidates who might campaign too close to the polling station at the community center of Supai village in the bottom of the Grand Canyon Tuesday.

The 60 miles of Indian highway, followed by an 8-mile hike down a cliff face and through the dry river washes at the base of the canyon, serve as a far more effective deterrent to political candidates and their representatives than the cardboard sign.

The village of Supai is located on the Havasupai Reservation, which covers an

Last Tuesday, because of heavy snow on the roads as well as on the last mile of trail out of the canyon, Towler missed his self-imposed deadline -- but not by much.

In the past, the ballots were flown out by helicopter the morning after the election. But Towler takes pride in delivering the votes from Supai the day they are cast.

"We send department heads to all of the reservation precincts. We had an opening at Supai and he said he wanted to take up the gauntlet," said County Recorder Candy Owens.

"He's a wonderful planner but he has become infamous for his travels down to Supai," Owens said.

Towler's dedication comes into focus when the scale of his endeavor is contrasted to the number of voters he serves. For Tuesday's Democratic presidential primary, there were 53 registered, active Democrats in Supai. Of those, 10 voted.

For most of the day, Towler sat in a folding chair chatting with Supai election workers Alberta Manakaja and Barbara Sinyella. The trio talked of elections past and how the village has changed over the years. With 700 tribal members, the population of the village has remained steady at close to 500. Sinyella said that although the young people of the village do leave to find jobs, they almost always return.

"There's a saying that once you live in Supai you will always return to Supai," she said.

Manakaja talked wistfully of the remoteness of the village and the pulls between maintaining a traditional lifestyle and keeping up with the outside world. While phone lines are scarce in the village, almost every home sports a satellite dish pointed over the towering canyon walls.

"We don't really know Clark Wesley," she said, referring to how Wesley Clark's name appears on the ballot. "Are they going to do things for the Indian people? Because they don't campaign down here. I've seen on the TV when they say if you vote for me, I'll do this for you." Manakaja said.

"These people running for president, I don't think they really know we live down here in this canyon. But we have to be part of the modern world, so we cast our vote anyway," she said.

When asked about the last political candidate to visit the village, the women pause to think and then start to laugh, "It was funny watching that Bobby Kennedy joining in when we were dancing," Sinyella said of the late senator's visit in the 1960s.

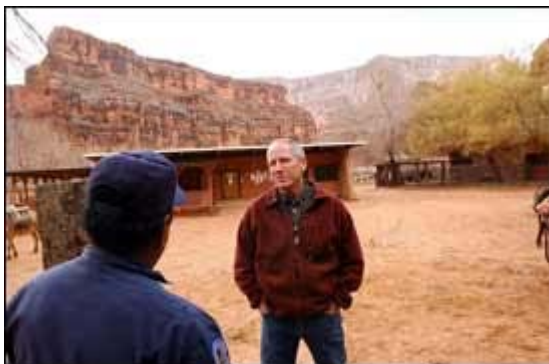
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Jake Bacon/Arizona Daily Sun The screen on the Acuvote ballot machine gives the total number of votes cast at the end of the day at polling station 28a. To order this photo, go to <http://photos.azdailysun.com>  
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Jake Bacon/Arizona Daily Sun Bill Towler reads over instructions for the voting machine while waiting for voters in the community center. To order this photo, go to <http://photos.azdailysun.com>  
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Jake Bacon/Arizona Daily Sun With the sheer cliffs of the canyon walls surrounding the village as a backdrop Towler talks with a Bureau of Indian Affairs police officer about using his phone line to transmit the election results back to Flagstaff when the polls close. As well as being geographically isolated the village has few telephones to the outside world. To order this photo, go to <http://photos.azdailysun.com>

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Jake Bacon/Arizona Daily Sun Each time the door at the far side of the community center opened Towler would ask, "are they on the list," referring to the list of registered democrats eligible to vote. As often as not the visitor was a family member coming to visit or a curious villager just coming in to see what was going on. To order this photo, go to <http://photos.azdailysun.com>

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Jake Bacon/Arizona Daily Sun With so few voters to take care of Bill Towler passes the hours talking with election inspector Barbara Sinyella, left, and election judge Alberta Manakaja about life in the village and how it has changed over the years. To order this photo, go to <http://photos.azdailysun.com>

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Jake Bacon/Arizona Daily Sun The Manakaja family

head towards the polls at the community center in the heart of Supai village. Roland had voted earlier in the day and went home to get his wife, Haven, so that she too could cast her vote for Wes Clark. "I like a couple of the candidates but I just have a really good feeling coming from Clark," Roland said. To order this photo, go to <http://photos.azdailysun.com>

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Jake Bacon/Arizona Daily Sun A family drives past a sign declaring the campaigning limit outside the polling station in the community center. More dogs than people wandered past the sign during the 13 hours the polls were open Tuesday. Of the roughly 500 permanent residents in the village there are 53 registered democrats with a further 11 on the inactive voter list. Of the 64 names registered to vote 10 residents walked through the doors of the community center to pick their candidate. To order this photo, go to <http://photos.azdailysun.com>

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