

# Political parties turn to technology for state assembly

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Political parties are having to adapt as emergency and public health orders curtail in-person gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like many businesses and other entities, the Republicans and Democrats of Montrose County have turned to technology to conduct critical activities remotely — and in turn, have seen one more reason why wide-scale internet access is important in rural areas.

“Things are progressing. It’s definitely a new world for us,” Montrose County Republican Party Chairman Ray Langston said.

The state assembly and convention establishes who will be on the ballot for state and federal offices for each party. Colorado’s presidential primary was held March 3. The primary for other offices is in June.

In order to proceed to the primary, candidates must hit a threshold of delegate votes at the state assembly. For Democrats, the state assembly for the Third Congressional District is April 15; the assembly for other offices is April 17 and 18.

For Republicans, the assembly for Congress is April 17 and the assembly for other offices is April 18.

“They are all remote,” Montrose County Democratic Party Chairman Kevin Kuns said, of his party’s assemblies and other key meetings.

“We’re not doing anything in person. It’s really simple at the end, but putting it together, you’re challenged.”

For example, not everyone is computer literate or has access to devices, he said.

Langston noted a similar problem some had in using an app for voting during the county-level assembly. However, the app worked OK and at least one person who did not have a smartphone, tablet or computer was able to use a friend’s, he said.

The state assembly will use video software and a text-to-vote app, which was only recently announced, so the local GOP is getting familiar with it.

“It allows people to vote in their home. It’s actually more secure than the app we used for the county assembly,” Langston said.

“There’s a benefit to this. Once this crisis is over, we might still use a lot of this (remote access) technology,” he added.

The party has been using the Zoom remote meeting software for its central committee meetings and plans to continue to do so for members who live in remote locations.

“People on the West End, it’s over an hour drive to get over here. We’ve tried other apps, but so much of it requires so much bandwidth they don’t have on the West End,” Langston said.

“We’re going to incorporate this into our meetings for people who have a hard time physically attending our meetings. There are some good things coming from it.”

Langston also said the situation created by pandemic restrictions serves to show the need for reliable internet in rural areas.

“This proves just how important this is. That additional communication is imperative to our society,” he said.

The Montrose Democrats have also been using Zoom software for about the last month, for all local meetings, executive meetings, candidate meet-and-greet events, town halls and trainings, Kuns said.

Although the personal connection and interaction is removed by using online formats, it’s necessary for now.

“At the end of the day, we would much rather have done it live, but it’s all gone fine. It’s as good as can be, given that nobody’s ever been through this process, on both sides,” Kuns said.