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**Cellular Registration**  
**Former Gov. Mark Warner launches drive to register voters via text message**  
 By Rachana Dixit, news editor  
 Posted on September 28, 2006

Cell phones are changing the way people do politics: text messages organize protests in South Korea, and even tipped the scales in Spain's 2004 election by eliciting a higher voter turnout, according to a case study presented at the 2005 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association.

On Sept. 22, former Virginia governor Mark Warner launched a national voter registration drive using text messaging in conjunction with Mobile Voter, a non-profit, non-partisan group trying to "facilitate the process of civic participation via mobile technology," according to its Web site.

Mobile Voter's current priority project, TXTVOTER '06, is to register young voters before the 2006 general election.

In 2003, Ben Rigby, co-executive director of Mobile Voter, thought to use mobile technology to do a social good instead of selling a product. Since the first time he entered a voting booth with his mom at 8 years old, Rigby has been passionate about voting and elections.

"It was a wonderland for me," he said. "It was so exciting." This is the first year for the project.

"We're targeting youth because they care about what goes on around them," Rigby said. He added that youth voter turnout may be low since politicians do not typically address issues that apply to them. However, he thinks that is changing.

"[Politicians] are seeing that mobile phones and text messaging are becoming rapidly important," Rigby said.

Recently youth voter turnout has increased, however, it still remains lower than any other age group of registered voters. According to statistics from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, during the 2004 presidential election there were 11,639 votes cast from registered voters between the ages of 18 and 24. There were 125,736 total votes cast across the nation.

JMU has also experienced low voter turnout amongst its students. For the Virginia gubernatorial election last year, a mere 3.5 percent of eligible student voters participated in the election.

Rigby hopes to register 55,000 through the project by Oct. 15, which is the registration deadline for most states. Thus far 13,000 people have registered.

The project is funded by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, which gave \$250,000 to Mobile Voter. Though Mobile Voter will have to pay about \$4 per voter to finance the project, Rigby said the registration process is still free for potential voters. Warner's campaign for registration through SMS began at a high school. He told students of Concord High School in New Hampshire to text "Warner" to number 75444 to be e-mailed their registration form.

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The Concord Monitor Online, which reported the story, said those potential voters living in New Hampshire and two other unspecified states would be sent a message referring them to their nearest ballot clerk, the only way to register to vote in those states. Rigby said North Dakota and Wyoming also are not allowing their potential voters to register through their cell phones.

This may have a lot of potential for JMU students and college students in general. If voter registration forms are available by a text message and an e-mail, then maybe absentee ballots aren't too far behind.

Freshmen Dan Holden and Blake Tankersley were too young to vote in the last presidential election, but now they've already registered to vote and they're looking forward to this November's election. Holden said this new move at ensnaring younger voters is a good thing.

"It shows how the world is changing," Holden said. He said, however, this new scheme might not be "fool proof." "Someone could type something wrong," he said. Tankersley said there might be a danger if a cell phone was stolen — it might jeopardize a person's personal records if voting records were lost.

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