

# CONTRA COSTA TIMES

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## Federal Glover: Technology offers new avenue to connect with constituents

By Federal Glover  
Guest commentary

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As an elected representative, I'm always seeking ways to improve communication with the residents of District 5.

In a district that spans the northwest corner of Contra Costa County, from Bay Point to Bethel Island, it is nearly impossible to talk to every individual resident.

I've long been an advocate of the use of public forums — or, town halls — to get important information to people and to get invaluable input from them. Recent town halls were about the county budget, Bailey Road improvements and the likelihood of prisoners being released early into our communities.

But that venue is extremely limited and inconvenient to most people. When you live a commuter lifestyle, there isn't enough time or energy to skip an evening with the family to listen to some politician. In this district, the distances you have to drive to attend a town hall in another city can be daunting.

This column, though reaching thousands of

households, doesn't reach Pittsburg or Bay Point, and as extensive as its circulation is, many people don't subscribe to the Contra Costa Times.

A news release's effectiveness is iffy. With space at a premium, a media outlet's staff must make decisions on the value and timeliness of information they receive. My releases could generate the interest of journalists — or, not.

What I think is important might not seem important to the editor or reporter. That's

OK. They are the professionals in this business. I have not encountered this problem with this local newspaper, but radio and television outlets are more selective.

The impact of the Internet is unquestioned. It affects traditional news outlets — TV, radio and newspapers — forcing them to alter their culture and the way they do their jobs.

In this new world, instant communication is commonplace. Anybody can be a commentator. Anybody can be a news camera person. Anybody can have their 15 minutes of fame.

Along with the good that comes out of our instant messaging, there are a lot of shortcomings. It is easy to be misled. Sometimes, you have to go through gigabytes of misinformation to get to a kernel of truth. Few of the wannabe journalists are required to verify their information.

The general public also can narrow their perspective on life because they choose to read only those available outlets that they agree with — even if the sources may be wrong.

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A darker aspect of the web is that it is easier for some people to deliberately spread half-truths or plain wrong information just to rile up people against individuals or issues. Unfortunately, it seems misinformation can always find believers who want "community" support for a particular viewpoint.

It used to be believed that if you read something in the newspaper, it must be true. Today, that axiom can be adapted to the new technology: If you see it on a monitor, it MIGHT be true.

Despite these drawbacks, government is also trying to adapt to this new technology. Driven partly to cut down on the paper shuffling among stacks and stacks of paper, in duplicate, triplicate or more, (saving innumerable trees in the process), Contra Costa County and some cities are moving to a paperless office. It's a massive job and will take some time, but that's the direction we are moving.

County forms and applications are available on the county's website. Tax payments, some fees and child care payments can be paid online. The county's website is [www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/](http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/)

On that website, you can find a wide array of useful information: where to get H1N1 vaccinations, employment help, where to find free or low-cost food, learn about upcoming county road projects, agendas and minutes of the Board of Supervisors, and more.

You can also link to my website, [www.cccounty.us/supervisorglover](http://www.cccounty.us/supervisorglover), where you can find out how to contact my office, learn about upcoming town halls and other events I sponsor such as the grant-writing workshops, youth summits and gang summits.

Both the youth summit and gang summit have their

own web pages on the social network [myspace.com](http://myspace.com), which is popular among young people.

In trying to get information to the residents of East County, it is no longer enough to depend on the newspapers to get the word out. With the assumption that most residents have access to a computer, my District 5 newsletter no longer is available in hard copy. It is only available electronically. If you would like to read the quarterly newsletter, or eGram: go to [www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=1619](http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=1619)

Last year, I started a Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/photos.php?id=103356261388](http://www.facebook.com/photos.php?id=103356261388), where I post pictures of most of my activities. You can also comment on my "wall" if you are a Facebook member.

My office makes extensive use of e-mails where we send out relevant announcements of meetings and events to those registered to receive our notifications.

Because not everybody has computers — and you can't replace face-to-face interaction — I will continue to hold the forums and town halls.

However, according to a 2005 study by hard-drive manufacturer Seagate, about 75 percent of Americans have computers. I believe harnessing the power of the new technology to increase communication can make us a better informed and effective community.

**Glover is the county supervisor for District 5. Reach him at [dist5@bos.cccounty.us](mailto:dist5@bos.cccounty.us)**

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