

AL Elections Chief Taunts Twitter Users Noting Hurdles In Absentee Voting Requirements



MONTGOMERY, AL - DECEMBER 12: John Merrill, Secretary of State of Alabama, speaks to the media in the Capitol building about the possible recount to determine the winner between Republican Senatorial candidate Roy ... [MORE](#)

By Tierney Sneed

April 21, 2020 4:05 p.m.

68

Start your day with TPM.

Sign up for the Morning Memo newsletter

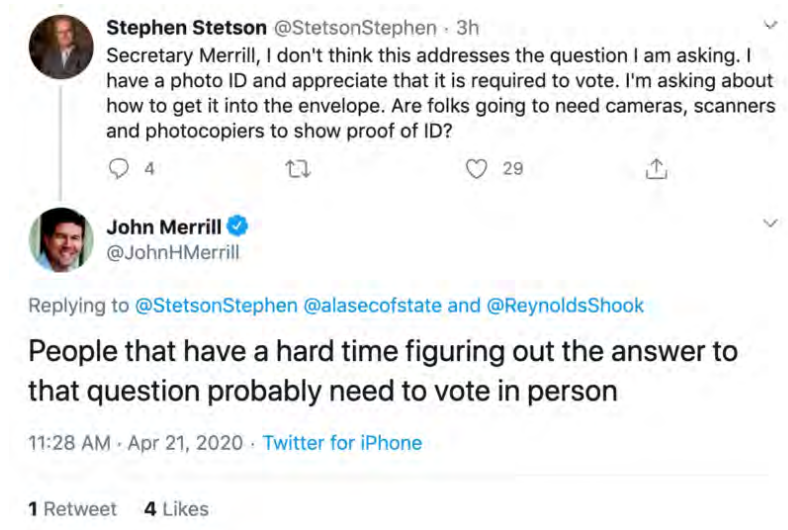
Some things never change. Among them, the dismissiveness of Alabama's top elections official to concerns raised about the state's strict election policies.

Alabama Secretary of State John Merrill (R) on Tuesday responded with mockery to tweets that noted the hurdles the state's absentee voting rules pose, particularly during a pandemic.

The state requires a photo ID to vote, and as absentee voting expands due to the outbreak, one Twitter user tweeted at the secretary of state's personal and official accounts asking for clarity on how the ID requirement applies to voters casting ballots by mail. The state requires that absentee ballot applications and the ballot itself both be submitted either by mail or in person.

"So to exercise my right to vote I need to have a computer, with Internet, a printer, with toner and paper, and a smart phone with a camera or a scanner or a copy machine?" the user said, prompting a generic response from the official account that he either call that office or get in touch with local election officials for assistance in getting an absentee ballot application.

Merrill, via his personal account, jumped in when the user persisted in his question about the equipment required to prove one's identity when voting absentee.



When a local reporter retweeted Merrill's response, Merrill pushed back in a similarly taunting tone.



This is not the first time Merrill has blown off criticisms about the obstacles to vote Alabama imposes. During a 2015 controversy over a mass closure of driver's license offices in the state — closures that disproportionately hit majority black regions — Merrill dismissed the point that few voters had obtained the free IDs the state was offering to those without a driver's license.

"You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink," Merrill told TPM at the time, while touting the free ID program as a reason the DMV closure criticisms were overblown.

When his office was criticized for not expending additional resources to educate ex-felons on their recently regained right to vote, he told ThinkProgress that, "You're assuming they even want to vote"

"I don't know if they do and you don't either," he said.

He's also called automatic voter registration the "sorry and lazy way out."

Amid the Twitter brouhaha on Tuesday, another local journalist noted that Merrill had always been "cordial" and "personable" in their interactions on the phone but on Twitter turned "into the raging id of Fox News."

Merrill explained the difference in his tone by claiming that "These trolls on Twitter have no interest" in helping people understand what was going on.

