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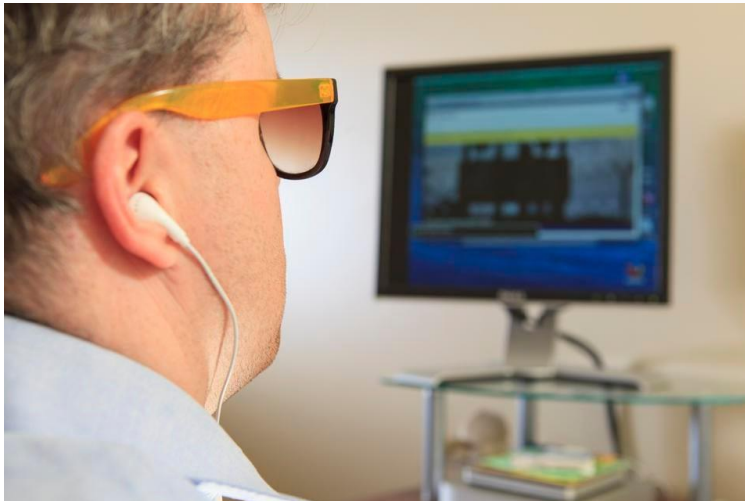
U.S. Midterm Candidate Websites Lacking In Basic Accessibility, Blind Charity Says

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I write about accessibility, inclusion and social justice.

Significant swathes of voters with sight loss are already contending with access barriers when it comes to participating in the U.S. midterm elections due to take place in November.

According to [research](#) published today by Miami Lighthouse for the Blind, which looked at eight midterm races in five key swing states, major access barriers prevail across the 16 candidate websites under review.

For all voters, including those with vision impairment, a candidate website represents a logical starting point for formulating an electoral preference and making informed choices.

Therefore, for a voting contingent that includes as many as one in four seniors, access blocks to this type of vital information are one step closer to disenfranchisement.

These stakes are further heightened in swing states and marginal contests, where any form of suppression of a sizable demographic can lead to an entirely different outcome.

Miami Lighthouse's research focused on midterm races in New York, Pennsylvania, Nevada, Arizona and Georgia.

The contests include the likes of Stacey Abrams [battling it out with Brian Kemp](#) to become Governor of Georgia, and a [one-time favorite of former President Donald Trump](#), Dr. Mehmet OZ bidding to become a senator in Pennsylvania.

The research undertaken by Miami Lighthouse's all-vision impaired team of IT and web accessibility analysts deployed the organization's proprietary ADA Compliance Meter to score the candidate websites against Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0/2.1) success criteria.

The success criteria included elements such as navigability with a screen reader, the use of keyboard controls, the presence of alt text to describe images and the ease of filling out forms.

A scoring system using scores between one and four was used to rank the candidate websites - with one denoting "not accessible" and four indicating that a candidate website was "fully accessible."

All candidates scored within the two and three decimal ranges indicating "somewhat accessible" and "mostly accessible" respectively.

The scores were based on a snapshot of the candidate websites between June 14 and June 16 2022.

Statements of intent

Whilst, unfortunately, due to continuous content insertion, it remains problematic for almost any website to be considered "fully," that is to say 100% accessible all of the time, some worrying trends did emerge from this research.

Not only did the websites not allow users to easily adjust colors and font sizes – accessibility table stakes for users with low vision – none of the websites had an accessibility statement providing a method of contact such as a live email address or telephone number users can call for assistance.

A website's accessibility statement is important because it can be viewed, quite literally, as a statement of an organization's commitment to recognizing and maintaining web accessibility standards.

A website accessibility statement can be a useful way of flagging known issues, receiving feedback and signposting alternative ways users can communicate with the organization.

Of equal concern is the fact that no candidate press secretaries or campaign directors have chosen to respond to the Miami Lighthouse's entreaties for an information meeting on these issues to date with the exception of the Abrams campaign.

Far from being on the margins, the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind maintains significant skin in the game where web accessibility audits are concerned – having used its in-house service to publish research on vital sectors such as grocery delivery apps and pharmacies over the past couple of years.

The Lighthouse also played an important role in spotlighting web accessibility barriers during the 2020 U.S. Presidential election campaign, capturing the attention of Joe Biden himself who went on to contact the Lighthouse for further counsel.

Some months later, this collaboration helped pave the way for the incoming Biden administration's pledge towards maintaining a fully [accessible WhiteHouse.Gov](#) site with an immediate addition being a robust accessibility statement – an element conspicuous by its absence throughout the previous administration.

On the topic of the midterms, Miami Lighthouse's CEO Virginia Jacko who is herself completely blind, laments, "In 2022, the blind and visually impaired still can't fully access political candidates' websites. Americans should be asking, how is that possible?"

She continues, "I am one of over 12 million adults 40 and older in the U.S. who are blind or visually impaired. One in four senior citizens in America has uncorrectable vision loss or low vision. Make no mistake: We are a very large voting bloc."

"Americans are entering a highly competitive midterm election cycle with enormous implications for our country. Every single vote counts. If blind and vision impaired voters cannot access your platforms and beliefs, they are being short-changed when it comes to making an informed voting decision."

Equally, if the candidates up for election don't even hold to the values of fair and equal access for all, let alone its ongoing practice – it won't just be those living with sight loss that are being short-changed but the American people as a whole.