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## Conservative bloggers launch West Virginia Red

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Republican political consultant Roman Stauffer admits West Virginia conservatives are a bit behind the times, technologically speaking.

So this week, Stauffer launched [West Virginia Red](#), a conservative blog that will post opinion pieces, news and events.

Locally and nationally, Republicans have lagged behind Democrats' online networking efforts -- but are "slowly catching up," Stauffer said.

"I think there was definitely a void on the Internet for Republicans, for conservatives," the 26-year-old said, "and I hope West Virginia Red will fill that void."

The site launched Sunday and takes its name from [West Virginia Blue](#), a site that features pieces on Democratic politics and progressive issues.

"I think all of us who are involved in political circles in West Virginia are very aware of West Virginia Blue," said Stauffer, who managed state Supreme Court candidate Beth Walker's unsuccessful campaign.

Ten people have signed on to contribute to West Virginia Red, Stauffer said. Some will remain anonymous because they work in media or other jobs where they are not supposed to publicly voice their political opinions, he said.

When recruiting bloggers, Stauffer aimed to find people from all over the state, he said. Eventually, he hopes the site can help raise funds for local and statewide candidates.

The launch is also part of a wider Republican effort to rally young people, a group that has increasingly identified itself as Democratic, according to national surveys.

"In order for us to make inroads in that group, we have to go where they get their news; we have to go where they talk to each other, and that's online," Stauffer said.

Both Democrats and Republicans have had the upper hand in technology at various times, said Robert Rupp, a political historian at West Virginia Wesleyan College.

"Everyone admits in 2004 the Republicans had better use of technology when it came to voter lists and voter mobilization," Rupp said.

Republicans also were the first to use direct-mail campaigns in the 1980s, he said. Today, they still dominate talk radio.

But President Obama's campaign capitalized on social networking tools to raise money through small donations and mobilize voters, particularly young people.

Unlike print media and radio, today's 24/7 online media allows activists to constantly "reinforce" people's beliefs, Rupp said.

"Really, these are drastic changes," he said. "And liberals have been keeping better pace with it ... So conservatives have to play catch-up."

Political strategist Joe Trippi, who ran Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign, pioneered many aspects of Web-based campaigning, said Mike Plante, a Democratic political consultant.

"I think that's the first time that it's been used on the grand scale," he said. "Obama became the successor to that in the primaries."

Months after the election ended, Democrats still are mobilizing support on the Web, Plante said. "It's a continuation of what they did during the campaign," he said.

The Democratic National Committee, for instance, launched [Organizing for America](#) to support Obama's legislative agenda. The site -- which is now focused on health-care reform -- features blog posts and videos, and solicits donations. It also helps visitors find local events and connect with other Obama supporters.

"The prize for 2012 is going to go to a party that uses the technology," Rupp said. "What it is we can only guess at this point.

"We like to think of politics as an old, established ritual, a game that's played by old rules. But the wild card here is technology. And technology changes the rules."

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