



DEBRA BOWEN

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE NEWS RELEASE

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Secretary of State Debra Bowen Announces Military and Overseas Voter Ballots Available 60 Days Before May 19 Special Election

SACRAMENTO – Secretary of State Debra Bowen today reminded military and overseas voters that county elections officials have begun preparing their vote-by-mail ballots in advance of the May 19, 2009, Special Election.

County elections officials are required to begin mailing ballots to registered California voters serving in the armed forces or living abroad 60 days before any statewide election. To qualify as a military or overseas voter in California elections, a voter must be:

- A member of the United States armed forces or an auxiliary branch;
- A U.S. citizen temporarily living outside U.S. territorial limits or the District of Columbia;
- A person living on a merchant vessel documented under U.S. law; or
- A spouse or dependent of a member of the U.S. military or an auxiliary branch.

“All eligible California voters, regardless of where they are on Election Day, have the chance to vote in the May 19 Special Election,” said Secretary Bowen, the state’s chief elections officer. “Distance is no impediment to democratic participation for Californians serving in the military or living overseas.”

More than six million Americans who live overseas or serve in the military face unique challenges when voting because states and the federal government have a variety of rules for registering to vote and casting ballots by mail.

California military and overseas voters (MOV) may use a Federal Post Card Application to simultaneously register to vote and request a vote-by-mail ballot. California law also allows voters to request vote-by-mail ballots from, and return them to, county elections officials by fax so long as they sign an oath to acknowledge they are waiving their right to cast their ballots secretly.

Military and overseas voters generally vote on a simplified ballot that allows them to write in their preferred candidates and offices sought, and their yes or no votes on propositions.

County election officials reported that about 70,000 MOV ballots were returned for the

– MORE –

DB09:016
March 20, 2009
Page 2

November 4, 2008, General Election. Of those, more than 1,900 could not be counted because they arrived after the polls had closed on Election Day.

Recognizing the logistical hurdles confronted by military and overseas voters, Secretary Bowen this year is sponsoring AB 1340 (B. Lowenthal/M. Perez). It would allow MOV ballots postmarked on or before Election Day to be counted if they arrive within 10 days of the election. Under current California law, MOV ballots received after 8:00 p.m. on Election Day cannot be counted.

Eighteen states and the District of Columbia allow the counting of MOV ballots that are postmarked by Election Day but received after that date.

The Secretary of State's office has a dedicated email address, mov@sos.ca.gov, which links military and overseas voters to staff who can offer personalized assistance. More resources are available from the Overseas Vote Foundation at www.overseasvotefoundation.org.

To download a copy of the Federal Post Card Application or for more information about military and overseas voting, go to www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_mov.htm.

The last day to register to vote in the May 19 Special Election is May 4.

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