



DEBRA BOWEN

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE NEWS RELEASE

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Secretary of State Bowen Applauds Nimble Elections Work on Behalf of Emergency Personnel In Fire Zones, Points to Legislative Solution for Future

SACRAMENTO – Recognizing the unique duties and needs of emergency personnel during a disaster, Secretary of State Debra Bowen today applauded the outstanding coordination in getting ballots to eligible voters in wildfire zones across the state Tuesday.

To ensure no voter in Congressional District 10 or Assembly District 51 was disenfranchised in yesterday's special elections because of the wildfires, Secretary Bowen coordinated with county elections officials, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the California Emergency Management Agency to distribute ballots and extend voting hours for emergency personnel serving in three wildfire-ravaged counties.

“By their nature, emergencies require swift response from skilled personnel who don't have time to plan ahead for their personal lives before departing for a disaster zone,” said Secretary of State Bowen, the state's chief elections officer. “It is the least we can do to make sure our firefighters, medics and other responders can participate in their democracy when they drop everything to protect us.”

Two gubernatorial executive orders waived state elections laws for emergency personnel who were serving away from their homes, permitting those who were registered voters in CD 10 or AD 51 but battling wildfires elsewhere to cast ballots at one of four Incident Command Center locations. In all, 10 people were able to vote despite being deployed away from their home counties on Election Day: two Contra Costa County voters serving in Mariposa County, one Contra Costa County voter serving in San Bernardino County, three Contra Costa County voters serving in Los Angeles County, one Sacramento County voter serving in Los Angeles County, one Alameda County voter serving in Los Angeles County, one Solano County voter serving in Los Angeles County, and one AD 51 voter serving on the opposite side of Los Angeles County.

“I am pleased that our work made it possible for several northern California firefighters to cast ballots while in Los Angeles County protecting our communities,” said Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk Dean Logan. “Efforts like this make us so proud to be elections officials.”

– MORE –

DB09:052
September 2, 2009
Page 2

Mariposa County Clerk/Registrar of Voters Keith Williams added, “While two firefighters were able to vote, so many more went out of their way to thank us for being there. Of course, I was really thanking them for being there for us.”

California law does not address the spur-of-the-moment nature of emergencies such as the scenario encountered with yesterday’s two special elections. Assembly Bill 1440 (Swanson), sponsored by Secretary Bowen and pending on the Senate floor, would formalize the steps taken to serve voters yesterday. Under current law, a provisional ballot only counts if it is cast in the county where an individual is registered to vote. AB 1440 specifically allows emergency personnel responding to a government-declared disaster to cast a provisional ballot in the county where the emergency occurred.

For more details on the September 1 emergency balloting, go to <http://www.sos.ca.gov/admin/press-releases/2009/db09-051.pdf>.

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