



DEBRA BOWEN

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE NEWS RELEASE

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Secretary of State Debra Bowen Announces Vote-By-Mail Ballots Available for February Primary Beginning January 7, Reminds Eligible Californians to Register to Vote by January 22

SACRAMENTO – The growing number of Californians who choose to vote by mail may start requesting their ballots and voting on Monday for the February 5, 2008, Presidential Primary Election, Secretary of State Debra Bowen announced today.

The number of people voting by mail has been moving steadily upward over the last decade. During the last statewide election in November 2006, 41.5% of the 8.9 million Californians who voted cast ballots by mail rather than at polling places. Six years earlier, in the November 2000 General Election, approximately 24% of California voters cast ballots by mail.

“Californians have the best of both worlds. For 30 years, every single registered voter in this state has had the choice of voting by mail or at a polling place,” said Secretary Bowen, the state’s chief elections officer. “Voting by mail is inherently more flexible and convenient for many people, and without the ability to cast a vote by mail, thousands of Californians likely could not take part in elections. Others, myself included, enjoy the ritual of democracy in going to the polls – running into neighbors, showing the kids how voting works, and even getting the ‘I Voted’ sticker.”

California has one of the nation’s most user-friendly vote-by-mail programs. Since 1978, every registered California voter has been allowed to cast a ballot by mail. Before 1978, only people who had certified medical excuses or who would be out of town on Election Day were allowed to vote absentee. A 2001 law made it possible for any Californian to register as a permanent vote-by-mail voter, meaning that ballots are automatically mailed to them for every election.

To reflect the fact that anyone can vote by mail for any reason, California’s absentee voting program was rebranded as “vote by mail” under last year’s Assembly Bill 1243 (Chapter 508, Statutes of 2007).

County elections officials begin mailing out ballots to permanent vote-by-mail voters on January 7, which is 29 days before the primary. An estimated four million Californians are registered as permanent vote-by-mail voters; many more register for one-time voting by mail in each election cycle.

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The last day to request a vote-by-mail ballot for the February primary is January 29. County elections officials started sending special mail ballots to military and overseas voters December 7.

For vote-by-mail ballots to count, elections officials must receive them by the 8:00 p.m. close of polls on Election Day. On Election Day, vote-by-mail voters may still hand-deliver completed ballots to the main elections office or to any polling place in the county where they are registered to vote.

For more information about voting by mail, or to download an application for a vote-by-mail ballot, go to http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_m.htm.

The last day to register to vote in the February primary is January 22. Registering to vote is simple and free. Registration forms are available at most post offices, public libraries, city and county offices, and the Secretary of State's offices. More information about voter registration is also available at http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_vr.htm.

To register to vote in California, a person must be a U.S. citizen, a California resident, and at least 18 years old by Election Day. People who are in prison or on parole for a felony conviction, and people who have been judged by a court to be mentally incompetent, are not eligible to vote in California.

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