

DEBRA BOWEN

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE NEWS RELEASE

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Secretary of State Debra Bowen Unveils More User-Friendly State Voter Registration Card

SACRAMENTO – Secretary of State Debra Bowen today unveiled a new California voter registration card that has been redesigned to make it more inviting and easy for voters to use.

“California’s old voter registration card looked more like an imposing tax form instead of a simple invitation to participate in democracy,” said Secretary Bowen, California’s chief elections officer. “The new card is inviting, it’s intuitive, and most of all, it’s a visual reminder that registering to vote is quick and easy. I hope the new card encourages even more Californians to register before the November 4, 2008, General Election.”

The new card’s cleaner layout features simpler language, shorter sentences, and a larger, more readable font. It is less wordy, containing about 730 words, as opposed to more than 1,200 words on the previous version. An expert analysis conducted by Transcend Translations determined that the redesigned card is significantly more readable than its predecessor.

In addition, the new card helps eliminate confusion about how to sign up as a nonpartisan voter rather than register with a political party. California’s fastest-growing segment of voters choose not to affiliate with any political party – nearly 20% of state voters “decline to state” a party preference. However, some voters reported they accidentally registered as a member of the American Independent Party when they intended to register as nonpartisan, or as “independent” of any political party.

To address that, the new card poses the direct question “Do you want to register with a political party?” and gives voters a clear choice of checking the “No” box. The previous card listed “I decline to state a political party” as the last of seven boxes a voter could check off under the heading of “Political party – fill in one oval.”

The first batch of redesigned cards is available now in English, Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese. The new cards will be phased in as county elections offices and groups that run voter-registration drives use up supplies of the old cards.

A panel of five elections and language experts worked with Secretary Bowen to redesign the voter registration card. The working group included:

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- Kim Alexander, president and founder of the California Voter Foundation;
- Evan Bacalao, deputy director of civic engagement for the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials;
- Tony Bernhard, a former Yolo County registrar of voters;
- Efrain Escobedo, executive liaison to the Los Angeles County registrar-recorder/county clerk; and
- Maria Mindlin, a language specialist and chief executive officer of Transcend Translations.

Before the new card design was finalized, the Secretary of State solicited input from all 58 county clerks/registrars of voters, political party chairs, voter outreach groups, and legislative leaders. The card was also field-tested for readability and ease of use.

“A broad spectrum of people reviewed the voter registration card drafts and gave a lot of valuable suggestions on how to improve them,” said Secretary Bowen. “Because of the collaborative efforts of so many Californians from diverse backgrounds, we have a much better tool for reaching out to potential voters.”

Furthering her efforts to make the voter registration process easy and accessible, Secretary Bowen also streamlined web-based registration options for Californians at http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_vr.htm. People can fill out an online voter registration form that will automatically add their county elections office address so they can simply print that form, sign it, and mail it directly. There is also an option to request a voter registration form to be mailed to them.

California law requires people to provide contact information and identity verification on their voter registration cards. The cards also ask about a voter’s political party affiliation, prior registration information, and interest in voting by mail. Laws and regulations spell out some format requirements, such as requiring voter registration cards to be printed in a certain size on card stock and include a perforated “receipt” for the voter to keep. However, the fundamental design of the card is at the Secretary of State’s discretion.

An image of the new California voter registration card is at http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voterred/vrc_new.pdf; and its predecessor is at http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voterred/vrc_old.pdf.

The last day for eligible Californians to register to vote in the November 4 General Election is October 20. The last day to request a vote-by-mail ballot is October 28.

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