



DEBRA BOWEN

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Secretary of State Bowen Applauds Decision to Allow Voter Registration at Federal Veterans Affairs Facilities

SACRAMENTO – Following months of pressure from Secretary of State Debra Bowen and others, the federal Department of Veterans Affairs has reversed course and will now allow non-partisan groups and voter registration drives at hospitals and in-patient locations.

“I’m glad the federal VA has finally recognized that it is illogical and indefensible to deny veterans in its facilities the ability to easily register to vote,” said Secretary Bowen, California’s chief elections officer. “That short-sighted policy is why I first asked Veterans Affairs Secretary James Peake to designate federal VA facilities as voter registration sites on May 1 – a request that was rejected.

“California’s Department of Veterans Affairs already allows nonpartisan voter registration drives at its facilities, and offers veterans voter registration cards when they move into state veterans hospitals,” Bowen continued. “It’s about time that the federal VA offers the same opportunities to veterans in its facilities.”

Secretary Bowen was the first state elections chief to ask the VA to designate itself as a “voter registration agency” as defined in the federal National Voter Registration Act. The designation helps ensure that veterans who receive services from the agency’s offices in a state have an equal opportunity to register to vote on site. Such an opportunity is particularly important for veterans who change their address when accepting federal benefits such as VA emergency housing, nursing home care, or rehabilitative care.

In her push to ensure veterans in federal facilities have equal access to the electoral process, Secretary Bowen was joined by Republican and Democratic secretaries of state. Congressional leaders, including U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, and nonpartisan advocacy groups such as the American Association of People with Disabilities, the League of Women Voters, and Common Cause also made major contributions toward changing the VA’s policy.

“The ability to vote is the most fundamental and cherished American right. Certainly veterans who served our country and upheld its democratic values deserve an equal chance to register and vote,” Bowen said. “I was shocked by the VA’s obstinance four months ago, but I am glad the agency has reversed its decision and will now respect the rights of our veterans.”

More information about the VA’s new directive is available at <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1564>.

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