



DEBRA BOWEN

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE NEWS RELEASE

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Secretary of State Debra Bowen Travels To Middle East, Speaks to U.S. Service Members About Voting From Abroad

KUWAIT – With more than 70,000 California voters now serving in the military or living abroad, Secretary of State Debra Bowen traveled to Iraq today to see first-hand how troops take advantage of voting opportunities. She also encouraged troops who have not yet registered to vote in the November 4, 2008, General Election to do so by October 20.

Traveling with representatives from the U. S. Department of Defense, Secretary Bowen is one of five state elections chiefs visiting a war zone to speak to troops about how the long-distance elections process works and how it can be improved. Also on the trip are the Secretaries of State from Florida, Indiana, Mississippi, and Pennsylvania.

“It is crucial that all eligible Californians have a chance to vote in the coming election whether they’re in Iraq or Irvine,” said Secretary Bowen, California’s chief elections official. “I have had the opportunity to meet our outstanding troops, share meals with them, and hear what else they think should be done to make voting easy and practical for them.”

The Department of Defense organized this trip to promote voter participation among members of the military and to educate the Secretaries of State on the service members’ experience voting while in war zones.

Military and overseas voters from California receive the first ballots in statewide elections. County elections officials began mailing ballots to military and overseas voters on September 5, 60 days before the election.

The more than six million Americans who live overseas or serve in the military confront unique challenges around election time. That’s because states and the federal government have different rules for registering to vote and casting ballots by mail.

To make it easier for military and overseas voters to vote, California’s elections process has been streamlined for them. Military and overseas voters may simultaneously register to vote and request a mail ballot using the Federal Post Card Application. California law also allows them to request vote-by-mail ballots from, and return them to, county elections officials by fax.

“Even though the election is just 35 days away, it is not too late for Californians who live overseas or serve in the military to register and vote,” said Secretary Bowen. “The streamlined

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registration and voting process helps ensure that Californians living abroad can participate in their democracy just as fully as the rest of us.”

The Secretary of State’s office has a dedicated email address that links military and overseas voters from across the globe to staff that can offer additional assistance at mov@sos.ca.gov.

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.

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