

DEBRA BOWEN

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Secretary of State Debra Bowen Announces Vote-By-Mail Ballots Available for November General Election

SACRAMENTO – Voting by mail begins today as elections officials start mailing ballots to millions of Californians for the November 4, 2008, General Election, Secretary of State Debra Bowen announced today.

The number of Californians who vote by mail has swelled in recent years. In the November 2000 General Election, approximately 24% of the 11.1 million ballots were cast by mail rather than at polling places. During the last presidential election four years ago, 32.6% of the 12.6 million Californian ballots came in by mail. In the primary elections in February and June of this year, 41.7% and 58.7% of ballots were cast by mail, respectively.

“Interest in the November 4 election is going through the roof and I wouldn’t be surprised to see a record number of Californians cast ballots,” said Secretary Bowen, the state’s chief elections officer. “Any Californian can vote by mail for any reason. Many people enjoy voting at the polls on Election Day, but an increasing number of voters find the mail option to be an easy way to beat the crowds by voting at their convenience.”

The Secretary of State does not predict turnout, but all signs point to high interest in this historic election. Recently, the Secretary of State’s office has processed between 6,000 and 10,000 voter registration cards a day leading up to the October 20 voter registration deadline. Between 1,500 and 3,000 people a day are calling the Secretary’s toll-free Voter Hotline, most frequently asking about the deadline to register to vote, how to get a vote-by-mail ballot, and how to verify their registration status.

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.

County elections officials begin mailing out ballots to permanent vote-by-mail voters today, which is 29 days before the election. More than four million Californians are registered as permanent vote-by-mail voters. In any given election, tens of thousands more people choose to vote by mail on a one-time basis.

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The last day to request a vote-by-mail ballot for the November election is October 28. County elections officials started sending special mail ballots to military and overseas voters September 5.

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 their county 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 November election is October 20. 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 are ineligible to vote in California, as are people who have been judged by a court to be mentally incompetent.

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