



DEBRA BOWEN

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE NEWS RELEASE

DB10:048

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 12, 2010

CONTACT: Shannan Velayas
(916) 653-6575

Just How “Special” are Special Elections?

On Eve of Two More Special Elections, Secretary of State Debra Bowen Offers 20 Years of Special Election Trivia

SACRAMENTO – As voters in the 37th Senate District and the 43rd Assembly District prepare to head to the polls for tomorrow’s special elections, the Secretary of State provided a round-up of special election facts and trends.

“Special elections are not as rare as they used to be and they present unique challenges to voters and cash-strapped elections officials,” said Secretary Debra Bowen, California’s chief elections officer. “Our democracy depends on citizen representation, but most voters get excited about going to the polls in June or November for a gubernatorial or presidential election, not in January or April or December to vote on a single contest.”

Highlights of California Special Election Trends

- In the last 20 years, there have been 96 special primary and general elections to fill vacant seats in the Assembly, Senate and Congress in California, an average of 4.8 per year.
- The highest voter turnout for a special election that did not coincide with an already scheduled statewide election was 52.2 percent in 1998 when Lois Capps was elected to fill a vacancy in the 22nd Congressional District.
- In 2009, the voter turnout in the special elections to fill the vacancies in Senate District 26 and Assembly District 51 garnered the lowest voter turnout in the last 20 years, when 7.9 percent of the electorate turned out to vote in each election.
- In the January 12, 2010 special general election in the 72nd Assembly District, 15.6 percent of voters turned out to vote, and 81 percent of voters voted by mail.
- The average voter turnout in special elections since 1990 is 24.7 percent.
- The most special legislative and congressional elections in a single year since 1990: 18 in 1993. The combined average voter turnout for those elections was 27 percent.
- Since 1990, there has been at least one special election every year, except in 2002, 2003 and 2004.

A special election is held in a legislative or congressional district when a vacancy occurs, unless the vacancy takes place after the nomination period in the final year in office. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast in Tuesday’s elections, the run-off special general elections will take place June 8 and will coincide with the Statewide Direct Primary Election. The cost of a special election can vary widely and differs from county to county.

– MORE –

DB10:048
April 12, 2010
Page 2

The most recent Report of Registration shows there are 462,132 registered voters in the 37th Senate District and 200,168 registered voters in the 43rd Assembly District. Polling places are open between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Results will be available on the Secretary of State's website after the polls close at www.sos.ca.gov/elect-results/.

To sign up for regular election updates via email, RSS feed or Twitter, go to www.sos.ca.gov/multimedia.

###