



DEBRA BOWEN

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE

NEWS RELEASE

DB07:071

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 11, 2007

Contact: Nicole Winger
(916) 653-6575

Secretary of State Debra Bowen Welcomes Rebranding of California's Absentee Voting Program

SACRAMENTO – California's absentee voting program will be rebranded as "Vote by Mail" to better reflect voters' rights, thanks to Assembly Bill 1243 (Karnette) which was signed into law today.

"Years ago, a voter truly had to prove they were going to be 'absent' and couldn't make it to the polls on Election Day before they could vote by mail," said Secretary of State Debra Bowen, California's chief elections official. "Today, thanks to changes in the law, nearly half of all Californians are voting by mail because it's so convenient. This rebranding will remind people that all registered voters can vote by mail in California, regardless of whether they're going to be 'absent' from their home counties on Election Day."

Voting by mail has trended upward in recent years. During the last statewide election in November 2006, 41.5% of California voters cast ballots by mail rather than at polling places. Four years earlier, in the November 2000 General Election, approximately 24% of California voters cast absentee ballots.

For nearly 30 years, every registered California voter has been allowed to vote by mail. Prior to 1978, only people who had certified medical excuses or could demonstrate they would be out of town on Election Day were allowed to vote absentee. As an Assemblywoman, Bowen in 1994 authored legislation that would have allowed any voter, without restrictions, to permanently register to vote by mail. Then-Governor Pete Wilson vetoed Bowen's AB 2446, but another legislator succeeded with a similar bill several years later. Since 2001, any California voter who wanted to become a "permanent absentee voter" has had that choice.

"In California, there is no reason to miss out on an election," Bowen said. "Studies have shown that people who vote by mail are more regular voters than those who cast ballots at the polls. If voter registration cards have a checkbox for 'Vote by Mail' status, people will more clearly understand they can participate in every election without having to set foot in a polling place."

California has one of the nation's most user-friendly vote-by-mail programs. To ensure the integrity of votes cast by mail, county elections officials have additional safeguards such as signature verification.

AB 1243 becomes law January 1, 2008. The last day to register to vote in the February 5, 2008 Presidential Primary Election is January 22, and the last day to request a vote-by-mail ballot is January 29.

###