



# DEBRA BOWEN

## CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE NEWS RELEASE

DB07:073

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
October 12, 2007

Contact: Nicole Winger  
(916) 653-6575

### Secretary of State Debra Bowen Disappointed In Vetoes of Common-Sense Voter-Rights Bills

**SACRAMENTO** – Secretary of State Debra Bowen today expressed her disappointment with the Governor’s decision to veto three bills designed to make it easier for high-school students to be poll workers, for Californians to verify their voter registration status, and for vote-by-mail voters to return their ballots.

“At a time when fewer people are registering to vote, it’s frustrating to see the Governor veto three common-sense measures that encourage Californians to actively participate in their democracy,” said Secretary Bowen, the state’s chief elections official. “With three statewide elections coming next year, we should be doing everything we can to encourage people to participate in the electoral process, from volunteering at the polls to voting.”

AB 466 (Hancock) would have ensured that students could volunteer at the polls on Election Day without depriving their schools of their average daily attendance money. Faced with difficulties recruiting enough poll workers for Election Day, elections officials are relying more and more on student poll workers to bridge the gap. For their part, students get to “learn and earn” – experiencing a real election up close while earning a small stipend. As a state senator last year, Secretary Bowen carried a similar bill, SB 1193, which was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger.

“Students can learn lessons at the polls that they can’t experience in any classroom,” Bowen said. “Civic engagement is a habit that should be developed early and reinforced often. High schoolers will be eligible to vote soon, and studies show that the sooner young people learn about the voting process, the more likely they are to make it a routine for life.”

AB 1151 (Lieu) would have required county elections officials to allow voters to check their registration status via the Internet or a toll-free phone number. Some counties, including Sacramento and San Mateo, already allow voters to check their registration online. Last year as a state senator, Secretary Bowen authored a similar measure, SB 1725, which requires counties to allow voters to check their vote-by-mail ballots via the Internet or a toll-free phone number once they have been mailed back to county elections offices. Governor Schwarzenegger signed that bill into law.

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“This was particularly important for first-time voters and people who have recently moved and re-registered to vote,” said Bowen. “With a click of a mouse or a quick call, voters could have checked their registration, rather than discovering at the polls on Election Day – when it is too late – that the county never got their voter registration form or that it was erroneously rejected for some reason.”

AB 773 (Blakeslee) would have allowed voters to return their vote-by-mail ballots to any polling place in the state on Election Day. Under current law, voters can only return vote-by-mail ballots on Election Day to a county registrar or polling place within the county where they are registered to vote. Under AB 773, election officials who received vote-by-mail ballots that belonged to other counties could have forwarded them shortly after the election.

“California has a highly mobile population, and many people work in a different county than the one they live in,” said Bowen. “This bill would have allowed people who forget to mail in a ballot and are commuting to a job far from home or are traveling within the state on Election Day to turn in their vote-by-mail ballots at any polling place or election office and have their votes counted. Right now, these voters don’t have their ballots counted, and it’s disappointing the Governor couldn’t support a solution to this problem that’s so simple and inexpensive.”

The California Presidential Primary Election will be held February 5, 2008. The Direct Primary Election is set for June 3, 2008, and the General Election will be held November 4, 2008.

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