



Major Election Integrity Bills Moving Forward in California

August 18, 2006

NEWS ADVISORY

State Senator Debra Bowen (D-Redondo Beach) indicated today that five significant election integrity bills she's authoring will be heard on the Senate floor before the Legislature adjourns on August 31 and are likely to be passed and sent to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's desk for signature. Most of the bills have enjoyed widespread bipartisan support and if they are approved by the Legislature, the Governor will have until September 30th to decide whether to sign or veto the measures.

Senator Bowen, Democratic candidate for Secretary of State, has been relentless in the pursuit of increased transparency of elections and protection of the rights of citizens to actively participate in the election monitoring process to ensure fair and honest elections. Her legislative agenda has included tighter controls on electronic voting systems which now dominate the election system landscape. Senator Bowen chairs the Senate Elections, Reapportionment and Constitutional Amendments Committee. The Bowen bills aimed at open, fair and transparent elections are summarized below. (Click bill numbers for full text.)

SB 1747 Citizen observers – Allows any bona fide association of citizens or a media organization to have up to two representatives each to check and review the preparation, programming, testing and operation of the election day tabulating devices.

SB 1235 – Absentee votes included in audit/tally - Requires counties to sort absentee voter (AV) ballots and early voting ballots by precinct and include them in the mandated 1% random manual tally. The 1% manual tally is to provide a check against the count generated by the voting machines. Counties are already required to conduct a 1% tally of all ballots, but excluding absentee ballots – which accounted for 43% of the votes cast in the June primary [49% in Riverside County] – undermines the integrity of the audit. The bill also requires the 1% manual tally to be conducted publicly and that the results of the tally be made available to the public.

SB 1725 - Absentee ballot receipt verification – Requires each elections department to set up a toll-free phone number or Internet system to let voters check to see whether their returned absentee ballot has arrived back in the county elections office.

SB 1760 – Paper quality standards – Prevents the Secretary of State from certifying any election system for use in the state if the paper ballot or the accessible voter-verified paper audit trail (AVVPAT) won't retain its integrity and readability for the 22 months that elections officials are required to keep all election ballots and materials.

SB 1598 – Initiative backer disclosure – Requires initiative petition signature gatherers to tell voters up front whether they're volunteers or being paid to collect signatures, and requires them to list the five largest contributors to the initiative on the top of the petition.

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