



Secretary of State
DEBRA BOWEN
State of California

September 23, 2009

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Office of the Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

As California's chief elections official, one of my primary goals is to ensure that all eligible citizens in California have an easy and convenient opportunity to register to vote.

While Californians registered and voted in record numbers in the 2008 Presidential Election, thousands of people who were eligible to register to vote did not do so, particularly in lower-income and minority communities. Offering voter registration opportunities in state and federal offices that provide services to people in these communities can help provide eligible Americans with another opportunity to register to vote.

Therefore, I would like to renew a request I made in May 2008 to former Secretary Peake that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) designate itself as a "voter registration agency" for purposes of section 7(a)(3)(B)(ii) of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993. Section 7 of the NVRA, specifically 42 U.S.C. § 1973gg-5(a)(1), directs that "[e]ach State shall designate agencies for the registration of voters in elections for Federal office." Under § 1973gg-5(b), federal offices may also be designated, with their agreement.

In addition, federal Executive Order No. 12926, 59 Fed. Reg. 47227 (September 12, 1994), directs federal agencies to agree, if requested by a state's chief elections official, to be designated a "voter registration agency," if the designation is consistent with the department's legal authority and availability of funds. The designation helps ensure that veterans who receive services from the agency's offices within the state have a chance to register to vote.

Offering eligible Americans the opportunity to register – or re-register – to vote is particularly important for veterans who move as a result of accepting federal benefits, such as entering a VA nursing home, emergency housing, or rehabilitative care center. The NVRA already requires state offices that provide public assistance or services to people with disabilities to provide their clients with the opportunity to register to vote.

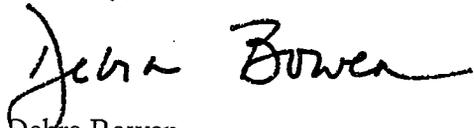
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As such, I am certain you would agree that it makes sense for federal offices providing similar services to offer the same opportunity to their clients.

Please join me in helping ensure that every eligible person can exercise the most fundamental right of citizenship in our democracy by accepting the designation as a voter registration agency under the NVRA.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this issue further, please feel free to contact me, or you may contact Jennie Bretschneider, Assistant Chief Deputy Secretary of State, at (916) 653-7244, if you have questions or need further information. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Debra Bowen
Secretary of State

DB:elg:jb

cc:

The Hon. Charles E. Schumer, Chair, Senate Rules and Administration Committee
The Hon. Bob Bennett, Ranking Member, Senate Rules and Administration Committee
The Hon. Daniel Akaka, Chair, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
The Hon. Richard Burr, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
The Hon. Robert A. Brady, Chair, Committee on House Administration
The Hon. Dan Lungren, Ranking Member, Committee on House Administration
The Hon. Zoe Lofgren, Chair, Subcommittee on Elections
The Hon. Kevin McCarthy, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Elections
The Hon. Bob Filner, Chair, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
The Hon. Steve Buyer, Ranking Member, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
The Hon. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California
Acting Secretary Roger Brautigan, California Department of Veterans Affairs
The Hon. Karen Bass, Speaker, California State Assembly
The Hon. Mary Salas, Chair, California State Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee
The Hon. Paul Cook, Vice-Chair, California State Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee
The Hon. Darrell Steinberg, President pro Tempore, California State Senate
The Hon. Jeff Denham, Chair, California State Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
The Hon. Lou Correa, Vice-Chair, California State Senate Veterans Affairs Committee