



What is HAVA?

The **Help America Vote Act [HAVA]** will fundamentally alter the way we conduct elections in California and across the nation. HAVA was drafted in the aftermath of the controversial 2000 Presidential election in Florida and was signed into law on October 29, 2002. The final bill is a compromise embraced by a bipartisan coalition that included many election officials across the nation, civil rights groups, disabled advocates and government watchdog groups.

This law establishes a new federal agency, the Election Assistance Commission, to serve as a national clearinghouse on election information and to provide federal standards for voting systems. Complex and inter-related federal mandates are also spelled out in the 161-page bill. HAVA requires California and every other state to implement sweeping changes by next year — during the Presidential election cycle, the most visible election with the highest turnout.

The most daunting of the new mandates include:

- ▶ Replacing the punch card voting systems currently used by a majority of California voters;
- ▶ Creating an interactive statewide voter registration database of California's 15 million plus voters that will be used by every county;
- ▶ Implementing new identification requirements for new voters;
- ▶ Ensuring disabled voters have both secret ballots and access to the polls;
- ▶ Providing a system to notify provisional voters whether their ballots were counted;
- ▶ Creating a complaint procedure for voter grievances about the election process;
- ▶ Creating a one-stop shop for all military and overseas voters;
- ▶ Improving training of our army of volunteer poll workers;
- ▶ Educating voters about their rights, including the right to a provisional ballot, the right to ask questions, and the right to get a new ballot to correct a mistake; and
- ▶ Ensuring that voters can check their ballots and correct any errors.

California's Secretary of State must write and submit a State Plan detailing how these mandates will be met. The final Preliminary State Plan is due in early June 2003. The Secretary of State will hold public hearings throughout the state in May 2003 to collect public input.