

**Hearing on United States Postal Service Facility Closures
and the Impact on Voters and Elections**

March 13, 2012

State Capitol, Room 2040

OVERVIEW:

The purpose of this hearing is to discuss the recent United States Postal Service facility closures and their impact on California, and to also explore possible areas of mitigation.

Financial challenges faced by the United States Postal Service have resulted in the approved closure of hundreds of processing facilities throughout the United States. California has been hit with 17 of those approved closures.

The timely processing of vote-by-mail (VBM) ballots is critical in California where more and more voters are choosing to mail-in their ballots. In the November 2008 presidential election 41.6 percent of the voters (5.7 million Californians) cast their ballots by mail. No doubt this number will rise this year given the continuous increase of voters choosing to vote-by-mail.

Secretary of State Debra Bowen has made appeals to the Postmaster General to delay closures from May 15, 2012 until November 15, 2012.

AREAS OF POSSIBLE MITIGATION:

Legislation:

Last year legislation was introduced to allow VBM voters to have their ballots counted after Election Day, provided they are postmarked by the United States Postal Service on or before Election Day. Specifically:

SB 348 (Correa) of 2011 - Would have provided that any VBM and special absentee ballot will be timely cast if it is postmarked on or before Election Day and received by the voter's elections official no later than six days after Election Day. The bill was held under submission in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 477 (Valadao) of 2011 – Would have permitted a ballot from a special absentee voter, as defined, who is temporarily living outside the United States, to arrive up to 10 days after the election and still be counted, provided that the ballot is postmarked by the United States Postal Service or the Military Postal Service Agency on or before Election Day. The bill was held under submission in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Other Programs:

Ballot Trapping Programs – Currently utilized by Placer County. This program requires an informal agreement between the local postal authorities and the local county election official. This may not work for all counties, but has been effective for Placer County Clerk Recorder Jim McCauley for the past 17 years.

Voter Education and Outreach – California elections officials would need to work on a consistent message to voters and the media about the need for voters to return their VBM ballots even earlier.

Included in the attached background materials is a multitude of information relative to the subject matter including letters from Patricia White, the USPS Pacific Area Marketing Manager (declining invitation to participate), and SOS Debra Bowen to the US Postmaster General, SOS Fact Sheet on closures, 2010 Superior Court Ruling from Riverside County (Riverside County ordered to count ballots that had not been picked up at Moreno Valley postal facility), explanation of Placer County's Ballot Trapping procedure, legislation noted earlier, a list of the planned USPS facility closures and recent press stories.