

From the Office of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz

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STATE VOTER DRIVE KICKS OFF

Deadline for registration is October 22

Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz along with a variety of civic partners announced a month long "Shape Tomorrow" statewide voter registration drive for the 2002 elections with a kick off event at the State Capitol in Hartford.

New voter drives will be conducted in the coming weeks by hundreds of organizations including schools, churches, government agencies and businesses. In addition, a 60-location English/Spanish billboard campaign was announced along with a partnership with a group of newspapers to distribute voter registration forms.

"One of the most patriotic things we can each do as citizens and as role models for our children is to vote and encourage others to vote," said Bysiewicz. "By casting a ballot you not only show support for your candidate, but also for the veterans and troops who put their lives on the line to protect the freedoms we enjoy in this country."

The billboard message will feature a "Vote Today" poster created by Norwalk fifth grader Elizabeth Fesenmeyer, whose artwork was selected from entries in the Secretary of the State's annual citizenship poster contest. Billboard space has been donated by a number of media firms.

"We are delighted to participate in this campaign guaranteeing Latino's awareness of the importance of registering and voting in the state," said Fernando Betancourt, Executive Director for the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission. "I am convinced that as a result of this effort from the Secretary of the State, Latinos will better understand their role as an agent for change and democratic participation."

The deadline to register to vote for Election Day 2002 is October 22. Registration forms are available from local Registrars of Voters or designated state agencies such as Department of Motor Vehicles offices. Forms can also be downloaded from the Secretary of the State's website at www.sots.state.ct.us

"The right of all Americans to vote and have their votes counted is a cornerstone of our democracy, yet a generation after the abolition of poll taxes, literacy tests and other legal hurdles once used to disenfranchise African Americans and others, many American voters confront an array of less obvious obstacles that silence their voices in the political arena," said Jimmy Griffin, President of the Connecticut State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "Sadly, the cherished ideal of 'one person, one vote' remains an empty promise and therefore, in no way should we who are eligible give up this right, especially after so many of our forefathers have fought and died for it. We would be fools."

Dr. Donna Balaski, Executive Director for the Board of Education and Services for the Blind said, "This program seeks out to present people who are blind or have other disabilities with information regarding their Constitutional right to become a Registered Voter. This is extremely important. The Voter Registration Kick-off makes a special effort to include all people regardless of circumstances so that all citizen's voices can be equally heard."

About 80% of eligible voters in Connecticut are currently registered. The Federal Elections Commission ranked Connecticut third in the nation in voter turnout during the 2000 presidential election with almost 78 percent of registered voters casting ballots.

"Together, I believe we can convince our citizens that every vote is important and that they can make a difference," said League of Women Voters of Connecticut President Enid Oresman. "We are proud to join this non-partisan effort to expand the number of voting citizens of this state."

For more information on registering to vote or hosting a voter registration drive call the Office of the Secretary of the State at (800) 540-3764.

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