

Calif. may make it easier to vote

By John Wildermuth, San Francisco Chronicle

Alex Padilla is looking beyond the state's borders for programs that could dramatically change the way Californians vote.

Among the ideas that California's new secretary of state hopes will boost anemic turnout: automatically registering people through the Department of Motor Vehicles and mailing a ballot to every registered voter.

"It will take two big steps to tackle the problem," said Padilla, a former Democratic legislator from the San Fernando Valley who replaced the termed-out Debra Bowen after winning election in November.

"First we have to register the estimated 6.7 million Californians who are eligible to vote but not registered," he said. "Then we need to have them actually cast ballots."

Voting officials across the state agree that something has to be done to get more people to the polls. The 42 percent turnout in November's general election and the 25 percent for the June primary were both record lows for California.

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