

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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### 1. The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) at Work

The Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), in the Department of Defense, is responsible for administering the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* on behalf of the Secretary of Defense who is the Presidential designee for the Federal functions of the law.

Specifically, the mission of the FVAP is to:

- inform and educate U.S. citizens worldwide of their right to vote,
- foster voting participation,
- protect the integrity of, and enhance, the electoral process at the Federal, state and local levels.

In carrying out the responsibilities of the *UOCAVA*, the FVAP provides information and materials to these citizens to help ensure their enfranchisement and promote understanding and participation in the democratic process. Program activities range from the development of the universal Federal Post Card Application (FPCA or SF 76) which is accepted by all 55 U.S. states and territories and serves as simultaneous application for voter registration and/or an absentee ballot; to the production and worldwide distribution of print, broadcast and electronic voter education and information services; to developing and maintaining a working relationship with U.S. states, territories and other Federal government agencies to simplify the registration and absentee voting processes.

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### 2. Helping U.S. Citizens to Vote



The Federal government has assisted certain absentee voters since 1942. The *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* requires that the states and territories allow certain groups of citizens to register and

vote absentee in elections for Federal offices. In addition, many states and territories have developed their own laws allowing citizens covered by the *UOCAVA* to register and vote absentee in state and local elections as well.

U.S. citizens covered by the *UOCAVA* include:

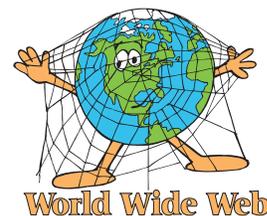
- Members of the U.S. Uniformed Services (on active duty) and merchant marine
- Their family members
- U.S. citizens residing outside the U.S.

Further details on the *UOCAVA* are in Chapter 2 and the complete text of the *Act* is located in *Appendix D*. The *UOCAVA* covers over six million potential voters worldwide.

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### 3. Online/E-mail Assistance from the FVAP

The Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) website at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov) provides voting related information and resources for *UOCAVA* citizens. In order to maximize the use of the Internet, the FVAP's main objective is to provide as much current information on-line as possible to help increase the knowledge of *UOCAVA* citizens so that they may be able to participate in the democratic process.



The website also provides downloadable forms and all of the FVAP's informational materials in electronic format to include this *Voting Assistance Guide*, current and back-issues of the *Voting Information News* newsletter and voting news releases as well as links to Federal government agencies and Congress, various U.S. citizen organizations overseas, Secretaries of State/Directors of Elections, state and local government organizations and other pertinent sites containing election information.

E-mail access to the FVAP staff is provided directly through [vote@fvap.ncr.gov](mailto:vote@fvap.ncr.gov).

The World Wide Web and the Internet are the most effective and efficient ways to disseminate information as they allow citizens to be supported on a real-time basis regardless of their geographic location.

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### 4. The Important Role of the Voting Assistance Officer (VAO)

The *UOCAVA* requires each Federal department and agency with personnel covered by the *UOCAVA* to have a voting assistance program. Department of Defense Directive 1000.4 and the Secretary of Defense's biennial Voting Action Plan establish policy and guidelines for carrying out an effective voting assistance program.

Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs) are critical to the success of these programs. These individuals, both military and civilian, are responsible for providing accurate nonpartisan voting information and assistance to all of the citizens that they are appointed or volunteered to help. They

aid in ensuring that citizens understand their voting rights and how to vote absentee under the *UOCAVA*.

The U.S. Uniformed Services have an extensive chain-of-command support mechanism for their VAOs. The Department of State offers voting assistance through its Embassy and Consulate VAOs to all U.S. citizens outside the United States. At the same time, many U.S. citizen organizations and corporations outside the United States designate and support VAOs to assist their members, employees and other U.S. citizens living abroad.

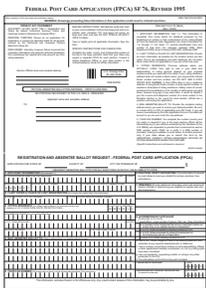
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## 5. The Voting Assistance Guide: The Principal Source for Voting Information

This *Voting Assistance Guide* is the primary source of information in carrying out a successful voting assistance program and is designed for use by both military and civilian *UOCAVA* citizens in their effort to register and vote absentee. For ease of use, these instructions and guidelines are organized alphabetically by state and territory in Chapter 3.

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## 6. The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA)



The FPCA is a postage-paid (within U.S. postal system, including APO and FPO addresses) postcard for use by absentee voters covered under the *UOCAVA*. The *UOCAVA* requires the design of a single postcard form to serve all states and territories both as an absentee voter registration application and an absentee ballot application. Chapter 2 contains general instructions for

completing the FPCA. The extent and manner of its use, however, is controlled by state and territorial law and sometimes by local procedure. Because of varying state procedures, the citizen should refer to the specific instructions for their state or territory in Chapter 3 to determine how to complete and submit the FPCA carefully and accurately to the proper election official.

Most states also accept the on-line Federal Post Card Application (OFPCA) form which is available on the FVAP website at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov). See Chapter 2 for details.

It is important to note that VAOs should order and stock four FPCAs for each citizen for whom they are responsible. By January 15th of each calendar year, FPCAs should be delivered in-hand to eligible voters and their voting age dependents. In addition, FPCAs should be provided to citizens outside the U.S. by **August 15th** of even-numbered

years and to citizens within the U.S. by **September 15th** of even-numbered years. Remind citizens to send in a new FPCA each time they move.

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## 7. The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB)

The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) is a backup ballot available if a citizen outside the United States (including APO and FPO addresses) does not receive the regular absentee ballot from the state after having made a timely application for the ballot. The FWAB is used to vote for Federal offices (President/Vice President, U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, Delegate or Resident Commissioner) in general elections. Some states now allow military and overseas citizens to use the FWAB in elections other than general elections or for offices other than Federal offices. Again, the citizen should consult Chapter 3 of the *Guide* for specific state or territorial requirements. Connecticut is not required to, but currently does accept the FWAB.

The FWAB is valid only when all criteria for its use have been met. Chapter 2 contains specific criteria for use of the FWAB. Also, a sample FWAB, with instructions, can be found on pages 19-26 of this *Guide*.

VAOs should order and stock at least one FWAB for each citizen for whom they are responsible.

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## 8. Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment (SERVE)

Congress has mandated the SERVE project be conducted to gather data and make recommendations regarding the use of the Internet for registration and voting as an alternative to the by-mail absentee voting process. FVAP is conducting SERVE with volunteer states and localities to explore the use of technology to maximize access to the polls for our Uniformed Services personnel and overseas citizens.



Several States are participating in this initiative and are listed on the SERVE website ([www.serveusa.gov](http://www.serveusa.gov)). FVAP encourages all eligible Uniformed Services personnel, their dependents and overseas citizens from the participating states to use SERVE to register and vote in 2004. SERVE will enable these citizens to register to vote, track their registration status, vote their ballots and have them counted in their home jurisdictions from anywhere in the world on a computer with Internet access.

FVAP is working closely with State and local election officials to build a secure system and ensure that the

integrity of the electoral process is maintained. The SERVE system will be available early in 2004 for Uniformed Services personnel and overseas citizens to submit voter registration applications and absentee ballot requests in participating States for the November 2<sup>nd</sup> Presidential election.

SERVE is the latest in a series of technology initiatives undertaken by FVAP as part of its mission to improve access to the polls for overseas citizens and Uniformed Services personnel. A small-scale proof-of-concept pilot program, Voting Over the Internet, was successfully conducted for the 2000 election. Eighty-four voters located in 21 states and 11 countries were the first citizens ever to register and cast their ballots over the Internet to their voting jurisdictions in Florida, Texas, South Carolina and Utah in a Presidential election. This project was awarded the Excellence.Gov award in 2003. SERVE is building on the knowledge and experience FVAP and participating States gained in this ground breaking project.

At the conclusion of SERVE, a report will be sent to Congress on the reliability, affordability, and security of Internet registration and voting on a large scale for UOCAVA citizens.

## 9. Ten Major Resources To Help the Voting Assistance Officer (VAO)

As a civilian or military VAO, there are ten major resources available to help carry out an effective, nonpartisan voter registration and absentee ballot awareness program. These resources can truly enable you to perform your role at a peak level. They are:

### a. Website - [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov)

The FVAP website contains this *Guide*, all of the FVAP's informational materials, the on-line FPCA, and links to state election sites, federal government sites and overseas U.S. citizen organizations. The website is updated regularly and contains the latest information.

### b. Ombudsman Service

The Ombudsman Service puts VAOs, citizens and local election officials directly in touch with the FVAP via e-mail, telephone or fax. Call toll-free in the U.S. at: **1-800-438-VOTE (8683)**, **DSN (military) 425-1584** or **Commercial (703) 588-1584** and fax **(703) 588-0108**. International toll-free phone numbers are listed on the inside back cover and on the FVAP website at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov). The e-mail address is [vote@fvap.ncr.gov](mailto:vote@fvap.ncr.gov).



### c. Electronic Transmission Service (ETS)

The Electronic Transmission Service faxes election materials (FPCAs, blank ballots, voted ballots, other election materials) where allowed by state law, between the local election official and the absentee voter when conditions do not allow for timely receipt and return of these materials via the postal system. Because procedures vary from state-to-state, consult the state pages in Chapter 3 and *Appendix C* for details.



If electronic transmission is allowed by your state or territory, the FVAP recommends faxing using the following numbers: **(703) 693-5527**; **DSN (military) 223-5527** or **1-800-368-8683**. International toll-free fax numbers are listed on the inside back cover. If a citizen experiences technical problems when faxing the FPCA or ballot, citizens may contact the FVAP via the Ombudsman Service (see above).

After faxing, most states request that the citizen mail the original completed and signed FPCA, or voted ballot to the local election official.

### d. DoD Voting Information Center (VIC)

The VIC is an automated telephone system which contains election information. The system is maintained and operated by the FVAP, and allows citizens to connect directly to the office of their U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, State Governor and State Chief Election Official. Additionally, approximately 30 days prior to an election, the FVAP invites all candidates for the offices of U.S. President, U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative and State Governor to leave campaign messages for *UOCAVA* citizens.

The VIC also serves as a means for military VAOs to communicate with their Service Voting Action Officer, and civilian VAOs to communicate with the Department of State Voting Action Officer. The VIC can be reached toll-free in the U.S. at **1-800-438-VOTE (8683)**, **DSN (military) 425-1343**, **commercial (703) 588-1343** or by using the international toll-free numbers listed on the inside back cover and on the FVAP website at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov). To access the VIC, callers must use a touch-tone phone.

### e. Voting News Releases

These are time-sensitive periodic news releases that inform and educate VAOs and UOCAVA citizens about the latest critical information on

absentee registration and voting procedures and on issues effecting their ability to register and vote. For example, if a state or territory makes a change to its procedures or election dates during the year, or a special election for a Federal office is called, a news release would be issued to alert citizens of these events.

The voting news releases are sent directly via e-mail to VAOs. Releases are also available on the FVAP website at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov).

#### f. **Voting Information News Newsletter**

This is a monthly newsletter published by the FVAP which contains up-to-date information on elections, absentee registration and voting procedures, a “To Do” list for VAOs, and other voting related matters that may affect *UOCAVA* citizens. The newsletter is sent primarily to all civilian and military VAOs by e-mail or regular mail. It is also available on the FVAP website at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov).



#### g. **Training**

A training workshop presentation is available for VAOs at the FVAP’s website at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov). There are two versions of the workshop. One focuses on the duties and responsibilities of VAOs in the Uniformed Services, while the other version is for VAOs at Embassies and Consulates as well as U.S. citizen organizations and corporations outside the United States. The training highlights instructions for completing the forms, responsibilities of the VAO and the resources available to conduct a successful voting assistance program. An online E-Learning Training and Certification program is also available (see the FVAP website for additional information).

#### h. **Election Dates Poster and Motivational Posters**

The Election Dates poster lists the dates for Federal office and state primaries, runoff elections and the general election. Best of all, this poster has a place at the bottom for the VAO’s name, telephone number and E-mail address. VAOs should display the poster so individuals will know how to contact them.

To help promote voter awareness, the FVAP also provides motivational posters. These are posters that contain an inspirational theme used to promote interest in voting.

Military VAOs receive the posters through their normal distribution channels. Overseas citizens can pick-up the posters from Embassy and Consulate VAOs as well as order them directly from the FVAP.



#### i. **Get Out the Vote Campaign.**

Produced by the FVAP, in cooperation with The Advertising Council, this campaign consists of motivational public service announcements encouraging citizens to vote. These are available in print, audio and video formats for use in local media worldwide. Call the FVAP for details.

#### j. **Chain of Command (Military) or Embassy and Consulate (Civilian) VAO Support**

As a military VAO, make certain your Installation telephone operator has your name and telephone number and that you know the names and telephone numbers of VAOs in your chain of command. A complete list of Service Voting Action Officers can be found on page 1 of this *Guide*.

As a civilian Voting Assistance Officer (VAO), know the names and telephone numbers of voting officers at your closest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Discuss your voting efforts with Embassy and Consulate VAOs and work together to develop an effective voting assistance program for all U.S. citizens in your community.

## 10. How to Contact the FVAP

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) can be reached at:

Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program  
Department of Defense  
Washington Headquarters Services  
1155 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1155

World Wide Web: [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov)  
E-mail: [vote@fvap.ncr.gov](mailto:vote@fvap.ncr.gov)

U.S., Canada, Guam, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands Toll-free:  
1-800-438-VOTE (8683)  
Fax: 1-800-368-8683  
Commercial: (703)-588-1584  
DSN (military): 425-1584  
Fax: (703) 588-0108  
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