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Working Together We Can Improve the Absentee Voting Process

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) works closely with state and local election officials and legislators to implement legislative initiatives that will make voting easier for citizens covered under the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)*. These are legislative best practices that have proven to make voting easier by eliminating barriers and helping ensure greater participation in the Democratic process while maintaining the integrity of the process.

Each year, the Director communicates with the Chief Election Official of each state and territory to recommend specific areas in which that state could ease the voting burden faced by UOCAVA citizens if those areas were considered and enacted by the state's legislature. Because electoral laws vary widely from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, FVAP Program Analysts, working closely with state and local election officials, identify areas that need to be improved and develop legislative initiatives for each state. The FVAP also provides sample legislative language regarding these issues to be considered by the state legislative body.

The following universal initiatives to simplify the voting process, as well as other initiatives, are being pursued this year where applicable in the individual states.

The Need for 45-Day Ballot Transit Time

One of the most frequent problems faced by citizens that live outside the U.S. is that they do not receive their absentee ballots in time to mark the ballot and return it to their state by the election deadline. The problem often lies with the date the absentee ballots were mailed by the states. The FVAP recommends a minimum of 45 days between the date the ballot is mailed to the citizen and the due date by which the citizen must return the voted ballot to the local election official for it to be counted. Allowing for sufficient mail transit time would help ensure that more citizens' votes would be counted, especially for citizens voting from overseas. Currently, 35 states or territories provide a 40-45 day

ballot transit time.

Elimination of Notary Requirements

Some states still require notarization on pieces of voting materials. Obtaining notarization can be difficult and expensive for citizens in some foreign countries and can be burdensome for many others. We recommend this requirement be fulfilled by allowing citizens to execute a self-administered oath on all voting materials: FPCA, ballot return envelope and state registration forms, where applicable. Under certain conditions, there are six states that require the notary requirement on the FPCA and/or ballot return envelope in elections for Federal offices: American Samoa, Guam, Maine, Mississippi, Puerto Rico, and South Carolina.

Expanded Use of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB)

The UOCAVA requires the FWAB be accepted for Federal offices in general elections. Since the FWAB is pre-positioned, by expanding its use to include special, primary, and run-off elections, citizens would also have a back-up ballot when state ballots for these elections are not received in enough time to meet the state ballot deadline.

The FVAP is also asking the states to expand use of the FWAB by accepting it as a simultaneous registration form and voted ballot. The information requested on the FWAB is the same as the information requested from the voter on the FPCA. Twenty-one states have expanded acceptance of the FWAB in one or both of these ways. (continued on next page)



Improving the process (continued from Page 1)

Special State Write-In Absentee Ballots

Citizens who live or are stationed in remote areas or who do not have access to regular mail service, such as Submariners, Peace Corps workers, missionaries, and military members are often unable to receive absentee ballots in time to vote. Unlike the FWAB, which is an emergency ballot for Federal offices only (see page one), providing these citizens with a State Write-In Absentee Ballot 180 days before the election would afford the opportunity for these citizens to vote a full slate of offices and allow sufficient time for the local election official to receive the voted ballot. Twenty-nine states provide such a ballot.

Electronic Transmission of Election Materials

The authorization for and use of sending voting materials via electronic means (fax and email) has increased substantially during the past four election cycles. Electronic transmission has proven to be valuable for citizens who are unable to receive and send these materials via ordinary mail. Electronic transmission provisions range from accepting FPCAs for registration and/or ballot request, to sending a blank ballot to the citizen, to acceptance of voted ballot sent by electronic means. Currently 51 states and territories accept one or more of these portions of the process via electronic transmission. Four states have not implemented any electronic transmission of absentee voting materials for UOCAVA citizens: Alabama, Guam, New York, and Wyoming.

Enfranchise Citizens Who Have Never Resided in the U.S.

Approximately 50,000 voting age children of U.S. citizens have never themselves resided in the U.S. and are not entitled to vote under current law in many states. While they are subject to all other requirements of citizenship, they are not eligible to vote. The FVAP is asking the states to allow these citizens to vote where either parent is currently eligible to vote under *UOCAVA*. Currently, 16 states have enacted this provision: Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, West

Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Emergency Authority for Chief Election Official

Granting emergency authority to the chief election official (CEO) in the state or territory would allow the CEO to designate alternate methods for handling absentee ballots in times of a declared emergency, where *UOCAVA* citizens might otherwise be disenfranchised. Currently, 18 states have enacted this provision: Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Virginia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Late Registration Alternative

Often the date a *UOCAVA* citizen returns to the U.S. and a state's registration requirements combine to disenfranchise the citizen. For example, if a Uniform Service member is released from active duty or an overseas citizen returns from overseas employment after the registration deadline but before the election date, they are not covered under *UOCAVA* and cannot vote by absentee ballot; neither can they register to vote in the election as a resident citizen. Allowing these citizens to register past the regular deadline for registration, even on the day of election, would prevent their disenfranchisement. Thirty states currently permit late registration for Uniformed Services members and/or US citizens overseas.

What You Can Do

Go to the FVAP website at www.fvap.gov for a copy of the Legislative Initiatives sent to the state of your residency. You can then contact your state's CEO via letter to urge passage of these legislative initiatives. See the *Voting Assistance Guide* for additional state-by-state voting guidelines also found on the FVAP website.

Moving? Send an FPCA to notify your local election official.

Also, send us an email so that you and your replacement can continue receiving this newsletter.

“Be Smart, Do your part, Vote!”

2010-2011 Voting Slogan Contest

“Be Smart, Do Your Part, Vote!” was the winning slogan for the 2007 Voting Slogan Contest. It was submitted by YNC Karen Bassingthwaite, U.S. Navy, Tampa, Florida. Now it is your turn to win. This is your chance to celebrate your independence by entering your voting slogan in the 2009 Voting Slogan Contest.

Your slogan will inspire citizens around the world to exercise one of their most fundamental rights as citizens of a democracy. You must act now because the April 9th deadline for submissions is fast approaching!

The contest winner and runners-up will not only feel the satisfaction of knowing that their slogan is helping the FVAP in its efforts to improve voter awareness, but they will also be given a certificate of recognition from the Department for their contribution to this important endeavor.

All submissions must include your full name, branch of service (if military), mailing address, daytime telephone number, fax number and e-mail address (if applicable).

Send entries via one of the following methods:

E-mail: slogan@fvap.ncr.gov. Text only (any e-mail message with an attachment will be deleted). One slogan per e-mail including contact information.

Fax: (703) 696-1352 or DSN 426-1352. Visit the FVAP website at www.fvap.gov for international toll-free fax numbers. Submit one slogan per fax including contact information. No cover sheet is necessary.

Mail: Federal Voting Assistance Program

Attn: Voting Slogan Contest
1155 Defense Pentagon
Washington DC 20301-1155

If submitting by mail, please type or print on regular letter size sheet of paper one slogan per page with contact information on each page.

Please join the FVAP in helping to inspire others to vote by submitting your entry today and you could be one of this year's winners. Remember the deadline is **April 9, 2009!**

Voting Action Officers

Department of State: Office of Overseas Citizens Services

Chief VAO: Ms. Elizabeth Gracon (202) 736-4986, fax: (202) 647-6201, votinginfo@state.gov

Deputy VAO: Mr. Tyler Mason (202) 647-6129, fax: (202) 647-6201
http://travel.state.gov/law/info/info_2964.html

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Army: Mr. Alton Perry (703) 325-4530, DSN: 221-4530, fax: (703) 325-4532, DSN fax: 221-4532,
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https://www.cnic.navy.mil/cnic_hq_site/BaseSupport/CommandStaff/NavyVotingProgram/index.htm

Air Force: Mr. William A. D'Avanzo (210) 565-5000, toll free: 1-800 616-3775 (Select options 1, then 1, then 2
from menu), DSN: 665-5000, fax: (210) 565-2543, DSN fax: 665-2543,
afpc/dpffovotefund@randolph.af.mil, <http://www.afcrossroads.com/VoteFund/Vote/default.htm>

Marine Corps: Mr. David E. James (703) 784-9511, DSN: 278-9511, fax: (703) 784-9823, DSN fax: 278-9823,
mra.voting.officer@usmc.mil,
https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/pls/portal/url/page/m_ra_home/MR/Personnel/Voting

Coast Guard: LTJG Frank Marcheski (202) 475-5382, fax: (202) 475-5927, Frank.A.Marcheski@uscg.mil
<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cg122/PolicyStandards/Voting/default.asp>

Links to the Services' websites are available at www.fvap.gov.

**Federal Voting
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Washington, DC
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800-438-VOTE (8683)

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DSN 426-1352

Visit our website for
international toll-free phone
and fax numbers

Email: vote@fvap.ncr.gov

Comments or suggestions on
this newsletter are welcomed
and appreciated.

Website:
www.fvap.gov

Recent Changes

In the January and February issues of this newsletter, we provided the results from the 2008 General election. Since the election, there have been several changes due to some elected officials taking new roles in the current Administration. Here is a summary of recent changes:

Arizona: Governor Janice Brewer of Arizona has replaced former Governor Janet Napolitano. Former Governor Napolitano is now the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Secretary in the Obama administration. Governor Brewer formerly served as Arizona's Secretary of State.

Ken Bennett is the new Secretary of State for Arizona. He will serve out the rest of Brewer's term, which is up for election in 2010.

Colorado: Senator Michael F. Bennett has been appointed as a Senator from Colorado, replacing Senator Ken Salazar who is the new Secretary of Interior. Senator Bennett will serve until 2010 when the office is up for election.

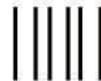
The new Secretary of State of Colorado, Bernie Buescher, was appointed to replace newly elected congressman Mike Coffman from Colorado's 6th Congressional District. He will serve as Colorado's Secretary of State until 2010 when the office will be up for election.

Illinois: Senator Roland Burris has been appointed as a Senator from as a Senator from Illinois, in the seat held by President Obama. Senator Burris will serve until 2010 when the office will be up for election.

New York: Senator Kirsten Gillibrand has been appointed as Senator from New York replacing Senator Hillary Clinton who is the new Secretary of State. Senator Gillibrand will serve until 2010 when the office will be up for a special election.

CORRECTION to February Issue (Page 2): The Air Force SSVR is Mr. Art Myers (not Art Meyers).

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