

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074  
MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

April 1, 2015

The Honorable Gene Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
United States Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Comptroller General:

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a review of the Department of Defense's (DOD) Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP).

The purpose of the FVAP is to ensure that military personnel, their dependents, as well as overseas citizens are guaranteed the right to vote by absentee ballot in federal elections, in accordance with the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA).<sup>1</sup> Authority to administer this statute was designated to the Department of Defense during the Reagan Administration and the DOD formed the FVAP to provide support to UOCAVA voters. Under UOCAVA, states are required to allow uniformed service and overseas voters to vote by absentee ballot in federal elections.<sup>2</sup> Recent reports, however, indicate that our service members and citizens living abroad may be facing difficulties in casting their absentee ballots.

Although turnout during the 2008 presidential election was reportedly the highest in more than 40 years, that trend was not evident based on a review of overseas balloting. The Congressional Research Service found that in 2008 "a significant number of military ballots (approximately 33 percent of the total requested) were never returned to local election officials or were returned as undeliverable."<sup>3</sup> A 2009 study conducted by the Overseas Vote Foundation (OVF) found that nearly 22 percent of military and overseas voters never received their absentee

---

<sup>1</sup> Pub. L. No. 99-410, 100 Stat. 924 (1986).

<sup>2</sup> Congressional Research Service, *The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act: Overview and Issues* (Apr. 21, 2014) (RS20764).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

ballot for the 2008 presidential election in part because military ballots were lost or significantly delayed by the postal service.<sup>4</sup>

Public reports indicate that veterans and their families have had a hard time casting their absentee ballots in various states. According to a report published by the Heritage Foundation, “the 2008 election data makes it clear that a vast majority of military voters (an estimated 75 to 80 percent) were disenfranchised by their inability to request an absentee ballot.” In Florida, Texas and California, states which account for nearly 40 percent of military voters, “less than a quarter of military voters and their dependents requested an absentee ballot for the 2008 Presidential election.” In Minnesota, which has the nation’s highest voter participation rate, only 15.8 % of the state’s 23,346 military voters were able to cast an absentee ballot.<sup>5</sup>

Since 2001, GAO has reviewed FVAP’s efforts and issued recommendations to improve the direction and oversight of FVAP services. However, we believe that continued management attention to FVAP still remains a priority. The Department of Defense’s Federal Voting Assistance Program was created to ensure that our service members fighting abroad to protect the rights of all Americans don’t lose their opportunity to vote in federal elections at home.

So that Congress can assess whether more can be done to assist the FVAP in fulfilling its critical mission, please provide answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent has DOD implemented previous GAO recommendations pertaining to DOD’s efforts to facilitate registration, voting options, and ballot transmission methods for UOCAVA voters?
2. To what extent has DOD evaluated its absentee voting program and achieved the goals of the Federal Voting Assistance Program?
3. To what extent do challenges remain regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of DOD’s absentee voting program?
4. Has the DOD’s absentee voting program made any changes to adjust to revised United States Postal Service delivery standards? If not, are any changes necessary?
5. What steps can Congress take to address the challenges facing the Federal Voting Assistance Program?

---

<sup>4</sup> Overseas Vote Foundation, *2008 OVF Post Election UOCAVA Survey Report and Analysis*, (Feb. 2009) (online at [www.overseasvotefoundation.org/files/OVF\\_2009\\_PostElectionSurvey\\_Report.pdf](http://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/files/OVF_2009_PostElectionSurvey_Report.pdf)).

<sup>5</sup> Heritage Foundation, *America’s Military Voter: Re-Enfranchising Disenfranchised*, (July 28, 2009) (online at [www.heritage.org/research/reports/2009/07/americas-military-voters-re-enfranchising-the-disenfranchised](http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2009/07/americas-military-voters-re-enfranchising-the-disenfranchised)).

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have questions regarding this matter, please contact Donald K. Sherman of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,

San Chu Hui

Eligh E. Tunney

Tammy Duckworth

Tim Walberg

Cynthia D. Lummis

Wm. Lacy Clay

Mark Mue  
305

Eleanor H. Norton

MICA FLO7

Cordyla B Maloney

Ron Kely

Matthew A. Crotti

Jim Jordan

Judy Rice

Blake Farenti

Mark D. Shuman

Moore

Steve S. Lynn

John J. Gorman

Michael R. Jensen

Pete Welch

Brenda Laurence



John Goh

Paul A. Goss

Stacy E. Plushett

Ernest L. Buddy Carter

Ken Buck

Ted W. Lee

Mark Walker

Thomas Massie

Mark DeSantis

Mr. Dur

Harry Johnson

Michelle Lujan Grisham

Basil Coleman

Alan Samuel

Paul B...

John ...

Will Hurd

TN-04

Brendan T. Boyle

Serald C. Connolly

Trey Gandy