

Testimony of Congressman Kevin McCarthy

Hearing on the Military and Overseas Voting: Problems and Progress in Ensuring the Vote

**Committee on House Administration
April 15, 2008**

Thank you, Chairman Brady and Ranking Member Ehlers, for holding this important hearing today to look at ways we can improve military and overseas voting. Specifically, I appreciate the opportunity to testify regarding a bill I recently introduced to ensure our troops' votes are counted. And I also thank my colleagues on the Committee for joining in this discussion today to look into ways to protect the votes of our brave men and women defending us abroad.

When I was first named to this Committee, I was proud to join a Committee where Republicans and Democrats are known to work together to find solutions. I wanted to be active in looking at our elections and working for solutions that rightfully give American voters full confidence that their vote will be counted, and counted correctly.

Last year, I went to Iraq and Afghanistan and was honored to meet our troops, who told me how proud they were to fight for our country. Everyday, our troops fight for our country. They fight for their mission. Most of all, they fight to protect our Constitution, and the democratic ideals that have carried our nation forward for over 200 years.

With that in mind, after a recent EAC study on military and overseas voting reported that only 47.6 percent of absentee ballots requested by members of the military ended up being counted, I was appalled at the fact that so many votes by our military servicemen and women were not being counted, both because they were unable to get their absentee ballots as they serve abroad, and because their ballots were not counted because they might not have been received by their election officials in time. Moreover, when votes are systematically uncounted because of the lack of dependability of ballot deliveries, both stateside and abroad, our brave men and women serving our country cannot rely on the fact that their vote counted. How ironic it is that our servicemen and women may not be able to participate in the very constitutional freedoms of democracy that they are so courageously protecting.

I have introduced the Military Voting Protection Act in order to help address one problem that could possibly be addressed quickly. According to studies, 23% percent of ballots arrived too late to be counted under deadlines applied by states. My legislation, cosponsored by my friends Ranking Member Ehlers and Congressman Lungren, would amend the UOCAVA to provide for the expedited collection and delivery of overseas uniformed servicemembers' ballots.

The bill would do so by directing the Department of Defense to make additional provisions for the collection, transportation, and tracking of the absentee ballots of overseas uniformed services voters. It would allow the Department of Defense to do so by using private carriers, and would ensure that servicemembers have access to a tracking

mechanism so they know that their ballot arrived and was counted. This expediting, and this assurance, is the least we can do for our men and women serving abroad, defending our freedoms, like our democratic right to vote.

With that said, I would like to work with all Members of the Committee. This bill is by no means a comprehensive solution to assuring our military servicemen and women that their votes will count. However, I believe it is a good first step that we can build upon in a bipartisan fashion, so that our heroes abroad can participate in this year's historic presidential election, and Federal elections thereafter. We must do more to ensure the franchise of our military voters, and I stand ready to work with you, Mr. Chairman, our House colleagues, the military community, and state and local officials to strengthen and protect military votes.