

Statement of Representative Carolyn B. Maloney (NY-14)
“Military and Overseas Voting: Problems and Progress in Ensuring the Vote”
April 15, 2008

Thank you Chairman Brady and Ranking Member Ehlers for inviting me to testify today about the voting problems faced by military personnel and overseas citizens. I also want to acknowledge the work of Representative Honda who has introduced legislation, H.R. 4173, the “OVERSEAS Vote Act,” to make it easier for overseas voters to cast their ballots.

I know that we agree, regardless of political affiliation, that all American citizens should be able to exercise their right to vote. Yet it seems that election after election, we are facing the same problems of lack of access to information, lack of access to ballots, and confusing procedures for submitting completed ballots to local and state election officials.

Although I, Representative Honda, and Representative McCarthy have all introduced bills designed to make the voting process easier, I fear that our efforts will be in vain because of the incompetence of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) housed within the Department of Defense.

The 2006 election, sadly, was the status quo for FVAP. For example, only 33% of military absentee voters were aware of the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), the form used to request an absentee ballot. Only 25% had received FPCAs by the DoD deadline of January 15th. And only 5% of Unit Voting Assistance Officers had delivered FPCAs to their personnel by the January 15th deadline. Lastly, FVAP spent \$1.1 million on the Integrated Voting Assistance System, but only eight votes were traced back to the system.

I have raised my concerns with the officials at FVAP numerous times, and yet the FVAP continues to spend millions in taxpayers’ dollars and the situation for military and overseas voters does not get any better.

Congress must step in to provide the necessary leadership to ensure that the three to six million American citizens who live and work abroad or serve in the military are being represented at the local, state, and federal levels.

Last year, along with Representative Joe Wilson, I founded the Americans Abroad Caucus in the hope that we can help give these individuals a voice in Congress. I also have introduced legislation, H.R. 4237, the “Overseas Voting Practical Amendments Act,” to make it easier for overseas voters to vote. According to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, about two-thirds of the absentee ballots requested for the 2006 general election by overseas Americans were not counted. Ballots either weren't received in time, were sent to an incorrect address, or filled out incorrectly. Most of these errors result from the unnecessary complexity of the process.

H.R. 4237 proposes simple, inexpensive fixes that will help change that and ensure the votes of every overseas American are counted. These changes include:

- Designating one official form as the overseas federal voter registration and ballot application;
- Prohibiting states from refusing to accept balloting materials because they are generated by a computer program, are not printed on a specific type of paper, or do not otherwise meet similar extraneous requirements that are not necessary to prevent election fraud;
- Ensuring that states provide correct information and sufficient postage on pre-addressed materials to prevent overseas mail from going astray;
- Allowing overseas voters to automatically receive requests for absentee ballots;
- Extending voting rights to American-citizen children born overseas who may have never spent enough time on any visit to the U.S. to establish residency before voting age;
- Giving overseas voters more time to correct a rejection of their voter registration or absentee ballot request prior to Election Day; and
- Allowing the State Department to help transmit the ballots of overseas voters in countries with inadequate mail service.

I believe these basic improvements would go a long way toward improving the voting situation for overseas citizens.

I look forward to working with the committee on this very important issue.

Thank you.