

**Review of Implementation of  
The Federal Voter Assistance Program**

**Memorandum Report No. 01-FP-M-045**

**August 2001**

**Summary**

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviewed the Department of State's (Department) implementation of the Federal Voter Assistance Program (FVAP) in response to American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) concerns about news media accounts of overseas absentee ballots being disqualified for the November 2000 Presidential election. Our review was conducted concurrently with the Department of Defense (Defense) OIG and the General Accounting Office (GAO) reviews of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-410) (UOCAVA). The Secretary of Defense and several congressional committees requested those reviews.

GAO and OIG jointly reviewed UOCAVA as implemented by FVAP at four U.S. embassies and one consulate general. The purpose of FVAP is to help members of the U.S. Uniformed Services, family members, and nonmilitary American citizens residing abroad to participate in primary and general elections when they are unable to vote in person at the polls. Defense is the lead agency for FVAP, and the Department implements FVAP for nonmilitary American citizens residing abroad. The Department's chief voting assistance officer (VAO) in the Bureau of Consular Affairs and the VAOs at over 200 posts overseas are responsible for implementing FVAP in serving over 3.8 million American citizens abroad. Our major observations are that:

- The Department, in partnership with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), is generally meeting the absentee voting needs of American citizens abroad. However, the Department needs to improve its outreach to all nonmilitary American citizens abroad.
- The Department's chief VAO was established to serve as a conduit for Defense FVAP information to posts abroad. However, post VAOs were either unaware of the chief VAO's existence or explained that implementation of FVAP relied more on a post's relationship with Defense FVAP than the

## UNCLASSIFIED

Department's VAO. Post VAOs received favorable overall satisfaction ratings of 75 percent by those U.S. Government and private American citizens polled by OIG. (See Appendices A and B).

- The Department's FVAP planning, funding, and training have not prepared it for the shift in the overseas population served by FVAP. Since 1986, the presence of nonmilitary American citizens abroad has increased dramatically, with nonmilitary citizens currently outnumbering the military overseas by 7 to 1.
- Most private American citizens used international and express mail services to return absentee ballots to the United States, and most Government employees relied on the military postal system. The Department's diplomatic pouch system was used the least. OIG found no evidence to support the assertions that the Government mail systems were too slow, or that the lack of postmarks caused many absentee ballots to be disqualified by local election officials. GAO recently testified that preliminary results from a phone survey of local election jurisdictions show that the most common reasons ballots were disqualified included: 1) ballots arrived after the established deadline, 2) ballots lacked a voter's or witness' signature, and 3) voters were not registered to vote. GAO also testified that their limited review of the military postal system and postmarking procedures after the election did not indicate that either missing postmarks or the lack of timeliness of mail delivery represented a systemic problem. Several NGOs suggested correcting potential postmark and mail transit time problems by having all states require that ballots arrive by Election Day.

---

## **Recommendations**

OIG recommends that the Department position itself for a more active role in FVAP implementation by structuring, planning, and programming for increased outreach to American citizens abroad. OIG also recommends that the Department identify its FVAP training needs and coordinate with the Defense FVAP to conduct selected sessions to train Department FVAP instructors. NGOs have played a vital role in partnering with the Department to assist absentee voters. OIG recommends that the Department acknowledge those contributions and foster increased partnering in the future.

**Objectives, Scope  
and Methodology**

The objectives for our review were to determine: 1) how well the Department and its VAOs have implemented FVAP in support of American citizens abroad, 2) what impediments, if any, there are to the Department's implementation of FVAP, and 3) how the Department can improve its FVAP services, including mail, for all American citizens supported by our posts abroad.

OIG performed primary fieldwork on this review from February to March 2001. Our fieldwork was conducted jointly with GAO at Embassies Paris and Rome, and Consulate General Frankfurt. GAO conducted fieldwork at Embassy Tokyo, and OIG conducted fieldwork at Embassies London and Tel Aviv. Although these posts represent large American citizen population centers for the Department, our collective findings from these locations alone were not projected worldwide. They were used, however, in conjunction with a worldwide absentee voter assistance survey of 216 posts to assess the Department's FVAP and develop review findings, observations, and recommendations. Of the 216 posts surveyed, 136 responded, for a response rate of 63 percent. (See Appendix C.) Although parts of OIG's review were performed jointly with GAO and concurrently with the Defense OIG, each office's scope differed, and each office will independently publish review findings and recommendations.

OIG fieldwork included conducting interviews, administering 125 absentee voter questionnaires, and conducting 25 small group discussions with U. S. Government and private American citizen voters. The following list identifies the officials and organizations that OIG queried.

Department bureaus and staff included:

- Bureau of Consular Affairs,
- Consular section chiefs,
- American citizen services officers,
- Public affairs officers, and
- Department and post level VAOs and their Foreign Service national assistants.

Government organizations included:

- Department of Defense, Federal Voter Assistance Program officials, and
- Federal Election Commission officials.

## UNCLASSIFIED

Government and private mail and pouch system officials and organizations included:

- Regional and local Military Postal Officers,
- the Department's Bureau of Information Resource Management,
- the Department's Division chief, Mail and Pouch System,
- the Department's Diplomatic Pouch Mailroom supervisors, and
- Regional and local officials of DHL Incorporated.

Nongovernmental organizations included:

- Democrats Abroad,
- Republicans Abroad,
- The American Chambers of Commerce,
- The American Community Roundtable,
- The Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas and associated club officials from Dusseldorf, Paris, Rome, and Taunus,
- The Association of Americans Resident Abroad,
- The American Association of Retired Persons Abroad,
- The American Club of Paris,
- American Citizens Abroad,
- The Agudath Israel of America,
- The Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel, and
- The Yale Club.

Major contributors to this report were Charles Anderson, issue area manager, and Herbert Harvell Jr., evaluation manager. Other contributors included Andrew Miller and Mikael Cleverly at Embassy Tel Aviv; and Katherine Brandeis, Carol Bingham, Judy Kuo, Claudia McLees, Matthew Hurley, Aleisha Woodward, and Romulo Gallegos at Embassy London.

In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act, all overseas absentee ballot questionnaires administered to private American citizens contained a Paperwork Reduction Act notice and Office of Management and Budget clearance number 1405-0127, expiration

date August 31, 2001. (See Appendix D.) This evaluation was conducted in accordance with the *Quality Standards for Inspections*, as issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, and the *Inspector's Handbook*, as issued by the Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of State.

---

## **Background**

On December 11, 2000, AFSA requested that OIG conduct a review of the Department's procedures for assisting overseas absentee voters. AFSA pointed out that UOCAVA requires the U.S. Government to assist overseas citizens to register and vote by absentee ballot. Although Executive Order 12642, of June 8, 1988, gave the Secretary of Defense primary responsibility for Federal functions under UOCAVA, the Department of State has a number of duties as spelled out in the *Foreign Affairs Manual* (7 FAM 1500). Specifically, posts are obligated to encourage all U.S. citizens within their consular jurisdiction to register to vote in all U.S. elections. Posts are to ensure that voters are provided the information necessary to register and vote, including election dates and other similar information of a nonpartisan nature.

Each post must designate a consular officer as a principal voting officer to ensure that U.S. citizens requiring information and assistance can obtain it promptly. Posts, through their voting officers, are to advise overseas citizens of their right to vote and provide appropriate information, assistance, and guidance to enable overseas citizens to apply to vote by absentee ballot. The FVAP *Voting Assistance Guide* is to be made accessible to U.S. citizens who wish voting information and assistance. Voting officers are to engage in outreach efforts to encourage voting by U.S. citizens living abroad. Absentee ballots and applications (Federal post card applications, Federal write-in absentee ballots, and state absentee ballots and applications) can be mailed by posts through its Army Post Office (APO) or Fleet Post Office (FPO) facility, or through its diplomatic pouch service in the event a post does not have military postal facilities.

AFSA explained that reported reasons for rejecting overseas ballots included not arriving in time, having a postmark dated after the appropriate deadline, the lack of any dated postmark, and the lack of a postmark that election officials recognized as indicating an overseas voter. Additionally, AFSA noted that a number of Department procedures could contribute to such problems. For example, pouched mail is often very slow and only receives a postmark after it arrives in the United States. In addition, AFSA noted that pouched mail has a Washington, DC, return address. Also, some

## UNCLASSIFIED

embassies took advantage of the offer by DHL and Federal Express to fly absentee ballots to the United States, which AFSA asserts may have resulted in some ballots being disqualified for having a U.S. postmark.

In response to AFSA's request, on January 3, 2001, OIG committed to conducting a review of the Department's FVAP and the mail procedures used to return absentee ballots to the United States.

### **The Demographics of U.S. Absentee Voting Abroad**

Some discrepancies exist in determining the number of nonmilitary American citizens residing abroad. Defense FVAP officials estimate that there are 4 million absentee voters overseas; 3.5 million are nonmilitary U.S. citizens residing abroad. The September 30, 2000, Office of the Secretary of Defense report, *Worldwide Manpower Distribution by Geographical Area*, indicates that 544,153 military, civilians working for Defense, and their family members are abroad. The Department, on the other hand, estimates the number of nonmilitary American citizens abroad to be 3.8 million. Private American citizens account for 3,784,693 and all Government agencies have 32,171 U.S. personnel and family members at diplomatic posts abroad, of which the Department has 6,158 Civil and Foreign Service personnel abroad. Over 30 Government agencies, administrations, and departments are represented at Department posts abroad.

The Department has 216 American citizen services (ACS) sections in embassies, consulates, and interest sections that provide absentee voter assistance as part of their consular work. The Department serves two groups of American citizen voters: expatriates and dual nationals. Expatriates once lived in the United States and are now living overseas, while dual-national citizens may or may not have ever lived in the United States. The Department could not determine the number of American citizens in each of those groups. According to Department voting officials, expatriate communities are concentrated in major cities abroad, are the largest voting group, are more organized, and hence are the easier group to contact. In contrast, dual nationals, particularly those that have never lived in the United States, are the most difficult population to reach, and their lack of a U.S. domicile provides an absentee voting challenge. To overcome this problem, VAOs advised dual-national American citizens to use their parent's last U.S. address or that of a county/parish/city clerk's office.

At posts abroad, VAO duties are among the multiple responsi-

## UNCLASSIFIED

bilities of ACS officers. Most VAOs contacted by OIG estimated that 10 to 20 percent of their and their principal Foreign Service national's (FSN) time during the 3 months (August, September, and October) leading up to the November 7, 2000, Federal election was spent on VAO duties. Those VAOs interviewed by OIG estimated that they assisted over 66,000 American citizens in registering and voting in the 2000 Federal Elections.

### **Outreach: the Department's Means of Communicating with U.S. Citizens Abroad**

Outreach is the term used by the Department to describe the means and methods used to inform American citizens of situations, policies, programs, and services provided by their incountry U.S. embassy, consulate, or interest sections (all commonly referred to as posts). The Department's primary means of identifying its outreach customers is using information from the list of citizens who voluntarily register with each post to form a citizens' network for emergency notification or evacuation purposes — called the Warden System. The Warden System contains both individual citizens and groups of American citizens, such as the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas. The completeness of a Warden System is dependent on citizens registering with their local post and their corresponding perceived need for emergency notification and other post services. ACS officers informed OIG that the more industrialized and stable the country, the less all encompassing the Warden System is in identifying all American citizens living there. In first-world countries, like the United Kingdom, where the number of resident American citizens is in the hundreds of thousands, a Warden System is not practical. Instead, the post uses an organization and media-based outreach system to inform and otherwise serve American citizens.

Methods the Department has used to conduct absentee voter outreach include Warden System notices; articles in post newsletters and the International Herald Tribune; establishing voter information telephone answering systems and web sites; hosting Defense FVAP voter assistance officer training sessions for Government and private citizens, companies, and organizations; and providing absentee voting materials, instructions, and U.S. postage stamps to American citizens visiting or contacting the post for assistance. (See Figures 1 and 2.) One post attributed a \$2,000 increase in its mailing costs to sending American citizens absentee voting materials. Most ACS sections include absentee voter information in passport mailings, and staff in two of the five posts visited stated they were inter-

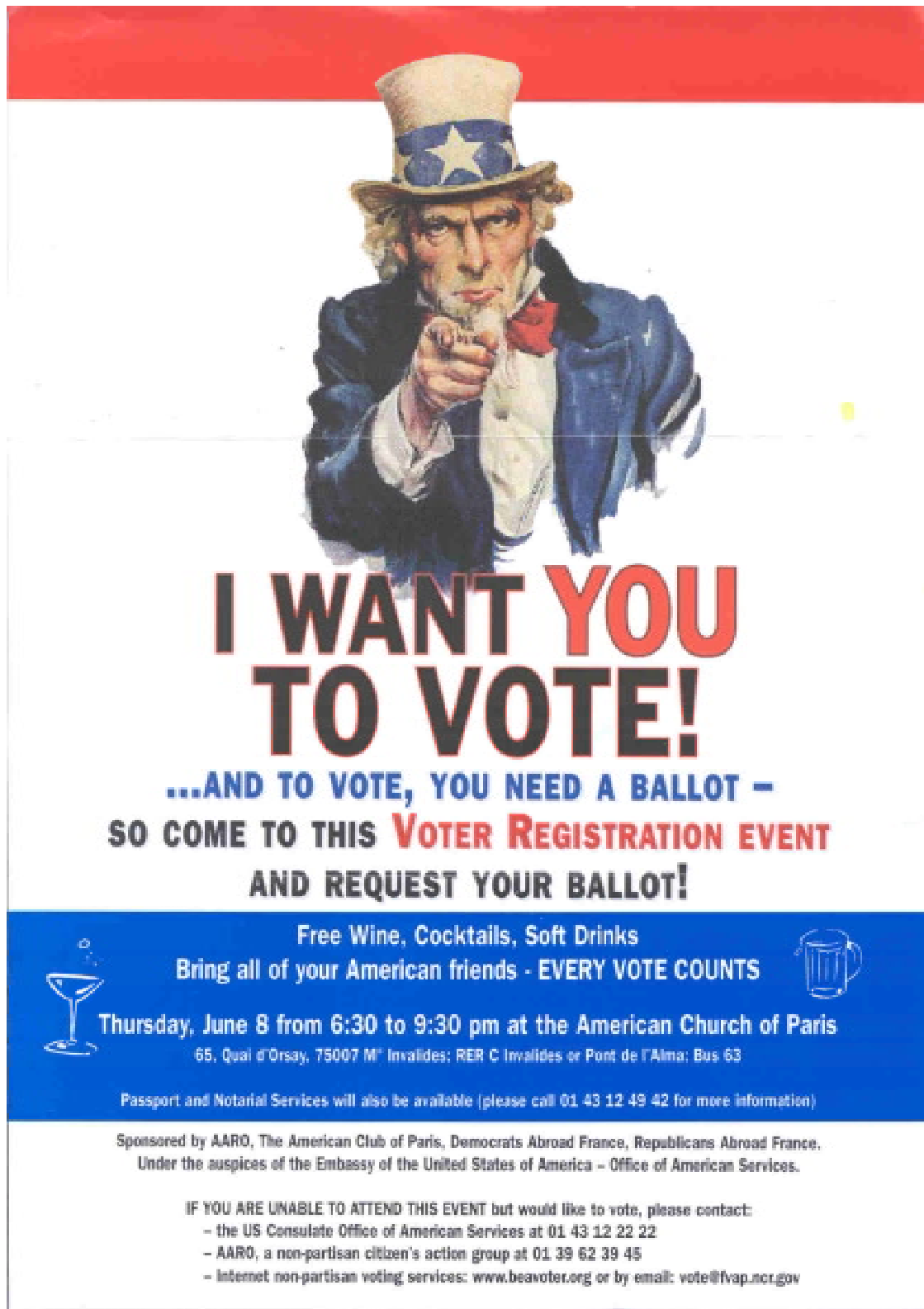
## UNCLASSIFIED

viewed by the local foreign press concerning the 2000 Federal Election. Post VAOs informed OIG that more than 66,000 American citizens were directly assisted during the 2000 Federal elections, and thousands more were assisted by organizations partnering with posts.

NGOs play a vital role in the Department's ability to conduct outreach and execute Department programs including the absentee voter assistance program. NGOs, including Democrats Abroad, Republicans Abroad, and many others, provide an organizational structure for reaching American citizens, coordinating events and programs, and partnering to provide services to the American citizen community abroad. During the 2000 Federal elections and every election since passage of the 1975 Overseas Voting Act, NGOs have provided members to be trained in voting assistance, conducted voter registration drives, and assisted absentee voters in completing and mailing their ballots. Based on OIG interviews with over 10 NGOs, there is evidence that thousands of overseas voters were assisted during the 2000 elections.

UNCLASSIFIED





**I WANT YOU  
TO VOTE!**

**...AND TO VOTE, YOU NEED A BALLOT –  
SO COME TO THIS **VOTER REGISTRATION EVENT**  
AND REQUEST YOUR BALLOT!**

Free Wine, Cocktails, Soft Drinks  
Bring all of your American friends - **EVERY VOTE COUNTS**

Thursday, June 8 from 6:30 to 9:30 pm at the American Church of Paris  
65, Quai d'Orsay, 75007 M<sup>e</sup> Invalides; RER C Invalides or Pont de l'Alma; Bus 63

Passport and Notarial Services will also be available (please call 01 43 12 49 42 for more information)

Sponsored by AARO, The American Club of Paris, Democrats Abroad France, Republicans Abroad France.  
Under the auspices of the Embassy of the United States of America – Office of American Services.

IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND THIS EVENT but would like to vote, please contact:

- the US Consulate Office of American Services at 01 43 12 22 22
- AARO, a non-partisan citizen's action group at 01 39 62 39 45
- Internet non-partisan voting services: [www.beavoter.org](http://www.beavoter.org) or by email: [vote@fvap.ncr.gov](mailto:vote@fvap.ncr.gov)

*Figure 1. Sample Post Outreach Material – Coordinated and Implemented with Nongovernmental Organizations*



*Figure 2. Sample Post Outreach Material*

### **Common Misconceptions about Absentee Voting**

Many of the challenges facing the Department, its post VAOs, and absentee voters abroad are illustrated by these common misconceptions about absentee voting:

- Post voting assistance staffs deny American citizens their right to vote.
- U.S. military personnel are the largest group of absentee voters overseas.
- Posts are a place to vote. On Election Day, some American citizens went to U.S. embassies and consulates looking for the voting booth. Some absentee voters believed they could vote at an embassy or consulate, even though they were not registered to vote in any state. Others thought they were voting when they attended an ambassador's election night celebration and an Internet online straw vote.
- Absentee voters can send their votes by fax.
- American citizens cannot vote unless they own property in the United States.
- Absentee votes count only if the election is close.
- Registering to vote makes an absentee voter subject to taxation.

These absentee voting misconceptions are fertile ground for global and local outreach by the Department.

---

## **Findings**

### **The Department Needs to Assume a Prominent Role in FVAP**

Beyond outreach, there is the larger question of the Department's role in implementing FVAP and, in view of the program's purpose and scope, whether the Department needed to play a leading role. The Department is responsible for providing emergency and nonemergency services, including absentee voter assistance, to all 3.8 million nonmilitary American citizens abroad. Military personnel were given the right to vote abroad by executive order in 1942, while nonmilitary American citizens abroad were not given the right to vote until 1975. NGO officials involved in the passage of the 1975 Overseas Voting Act and 1986 UOCAVA told OIG that Defense, with its infrastructure for absentee voter assistance in place since the 1940s, agreed to incorporate civilian voters into what is today the FVAP.

## UNCLASSIFIED

According to the *Voting Assistance Guide*, the purpose and scope of FVAP is to help American citizens participate in U.S. primary and general elections when they are unable to vote in person at the polls. Those citizens include:

- members of the U.S. Uniformed Service (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard) and the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,
- members of the U.S. Merchant Marine,
- family members of the above, and
- nonmilitary affiliated U.S. citizens residing outside the United States.

Since the inception of the Defense voter assistance program in the 1940s, the target population of FVAP has changed from almost entirely military to primarily nonmilitary American citizens living abroad, who now outnumber military personnel and their family members by a ratio of 7 to 1. The purpose of FVAP, although broadened by adding nonmilitary American citizens, has remained the same.

The scope of FVAP has shifted to a population for which the Department has become primarily responsible. However, none of the American citizen focus groups, post VAOs, or post responses to OIG absentee voting survey cables, recommended any change in the current interagency organizational relationship of FVAP. All lauded the outstanding job Defense has done in providing policy and executing FVAP. All NGOs except one concurred with that assessment. The exception was Democrats Abroad. They proposed that the responsibility for military and other American citizen absentee voter assistance could be divided. Democrats Abroad proposed, for example, that FVAP assist only military voters and either the Federal Election Commission (FEC) or the Department assist nonmilitary American citizen voters. Their rationale was that the number of American citizens abroad warrants dedicated assistance. FEC is favored over the Department as the best choice because FEC has experience similar to Defense experience with FVAP.

An FEC official, however, informed OIG that the commission's focus is administration of Federal campaign finance laws. The FEC Office of Election Administration is responsible for distributing information to help state and local officials administer better elections; however, that function represents approximately 2 percent of the FEC's budget. A Democrats Abroad official commented that

UNCLASSIFIED

## UNCLASSIFIED

the proposed division of responsibilities is a possible improvement, but that funding for outreach to American citizen absentee voters is more important than how or which agency or agencies administer FVAP.

The Democrats Abroad official told OIG that in 2000, Democrats Abroad funded \$76,000 in absentee voting advertising, and that was insufficient. A Democrats Abroad report indicates advertising resulted in hundreds of voters contacting their committees abroad, embassies, and consulates for voting materials and assistance. Additionally, advertising/outreach was credited with a 35 percent increase in Democrats Abroad membership between February 2000 to February 2001. Republicans Abroad officials told OIG that \$400,000 was spent on periodical advertising targeting absentee voters abroad. The officials explained that the largest voter registration drive occurred during Fourth of July celebrations abroad. They stated the Defense FVAP office needs to do more educating of overseas citizens on their right to vote, particularly how to fill out the Federal write-in ballot, and be more aggressive in obtaining free advertising space from various news media abroad. The Republicans Abroad officials explained that advertising/outreach is a very cost-effective way to reach overseas Americans.

Based on our review of the purpose, scope, and current implementation of FVAP, OIG found, that there are no functional or operational reasons for the Department to assume the role of lead agency for FVAP or a nonmilitary American citizen absentee voting program. OIG found, however, that the Department needs to place greater emphasis on its role in FVAP, especially its infrastructure and outreach to American citizens abroad.

### **The Department's Chief VAO Needs to Play a Larger FVAP Role**

The Department's chief VAO and over 200 post VAOs abroad implement FVAP as an ancillary administrative function. The chief VAO for the Department is in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of American Citizen Services, Africa Division (ACS/AF). He told OIG that the Department's FVAP is located in ACS/AF because that division is the catchall for miscellaneous nonemergency consular functions. It has the lowest number of emergency consular cases and the smallest staff: a division chief and four Civil Service officers. The chief VAO felt, however, that given the current level of FVAP responsibility, ACS/AF is capable of handling the program. Additionally, U.S. Government and private American citizens abroad polled by OIG gave post VAOs favorable voter assis-

## UNCLASSIFIED

tance ratings of 75 percent or higher. Voter assistance services polled included the post VAO's availability, knowledge of FVAP, and the quality and appropriate quantity of materials used to provide absentee voter assistance. (See Appendices A and B.)

OIG found, however, that there is no ACS/AF action plan or funding designated for voter assistance. One post VAO told OIG they did not know there was a Department-level VAO, although two voting information cables, distributed to all diplomatic posts in 2000, were sent by the Department's chief VAO providing his name and contact information. Several VAOs informed OIG that everything they requested or received was from the Defense FVAP, and that post voter assistance was a very autonomous program. Several consular section chiefs and VAOs expressed the view that the Department's VAO is ill-positioned in ACS/AF because that office has no policy review or interagency liaison authority. ACS/AF thus cannot effectively coordinate the planning, funding, training, and global outreach needs of a Department FVAP that serves 3.8 million American citizens abroad. OIG believes that the Bureau of Consular Affairs should structure its FVAP to meet those coordination and planning needs, thus positioning the Department to implement a nonmilitary voting assistance program in the future.

### **Absentee Voter Outreach Needs Improvement**

According to senior representatives of the 16,000-member Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas, U.S. civilian voters overseas are dependent on the Department. They believe sufficient funds should be allocated to enable each U.S. consulate to provide active overseas outreach. Currently overseas voters are dependent on individual consular officers, some of whom provide outstanding voting assistance to U.S. citizens as part of their efforts to participate in their country's democratic process. Other NGOs, including Democrats Abroad, also recommended additional Department funding for absentee voter outreach, their rationale being the nonmilitary American citizen population overseas and the need for the Department to take the lead in disseminating absentee voter information. Republicans Abroad officials told OIG that the Defense FVAP office needs to improve its outreach and inform overseas citizens how to use the Federal write-in ballot. Republicans Abroad rated the Defense FVAP web site as the best available; however, they stipulated that the Defense FVAP office needed to be aggressive in obtaining free absentee voting advertising from TV networks and publications abroad. According to Defense FVAP officials, the

UNCLASSIFIED

## UNCLASSIFIED

office advertises through the *Voter's Assistance Program Newsletter*, its web site, and U.S. embassies.

The Department's chief VAO informed OIG that Department-level outreach includes cables (telegrams) to all diplomatic posts promoting local absentee voter outreach and forwarding Defense FVAP voter information updates to post VAOs. Additionally, the Department's chief VAO provides e-mail or telephonic responses to FVAP inquiries from post VAOs. He could recall no Department-level outreach or funding for absentee voting information in international periodicals, such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, or the *International Herald Tribune*. However, he acknowledged that, with appropriate funding, such outreach would be beneficial to American citizens abroad.

A senior FSN voting assistant stated that for the 2000 elections, her post did no outreach through foreign publications and newspapers. She explained that the embassy published voter information in foreign newspapers 15 years ago but not since. She also addressed a concern raised in some OIG American citizen discussion groups, that FSNs are often perceived as less knowledgeable about FVAP than an American Foreign Service officer. She stated in most cases that was untrue, and standard operating procedures are to refer to the consular officer any U.S. citizen wishing to speak to an American official. She added that all oaths required for absentee voter material are administered by a Foreign Service officer.

In exploring other methods for American citizen outreach, OIG interviewed post Federal benefits unit officials and queried NGOs during discussion group sessions. The president of a Democrats Abroad chapter stated that outreach effectiveness varied from post to post and recommended using the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and its Federal Tax Return mailings as a means of distributing voting information. Federal benefits unit supervisors at posts OIG visited agreed that the IRS, Social Security Administration, Veterans Administration, Office of Personnel Management, and Railroad Retirement Board all provide benefits checks by mail to American citizens and other beneficiaries abroad. Those mailings could be used to distribute voter information, however coordination would have to be performed with each organization's headquarters in Washington and implemented by their respective financial/mail distribution centers. Post Federal benefit officials also stated that the best single source for such mailings would be the IRS followed by the Social Security Administration. Those views and observations are being considered in ongoing reviews of the UOCAVA of 1986.

UNCLASSIFIED

## UNCLASSIFIED

OIG learned that other U.S. Government agencies visiting posts conduct American citizen outreach for their programs. The VAO at one post suggested that the Defense FVAP should provide the Department and its posts funding to advertise FVAP in the global and local media. The VAO explained that when the IRS visits posts, it pays for news releases informing the American public of the services it provides, and FVAP could do the same thing. As indicated above, OIG believes the Department has the primary responsibility for implementation of the FVAP for nonmilitary American citizens, including funding outreach to inform American citizens of their rights and policies and procedures for voting from abroad. OIG noted that the Department does not coordinate with the Bureau of Public Affairs or the Office of Public Diplomacy in voter assistance outreach. OIG found that neither the Department's chief VAO nor most post VAOs used the capabilities of those bureaus in outreach efforts.

How much should the Department spend on FVAP outreach? OIG does not have a specific dollar recommendation; Democrats and Republican Abroad spent \$76,000 and \$400,000, respectively. Additionally, the Department of Defense FVAP has a Pentagon staff of 13 people, a multitude of uniformed service VAOs, and an annual budget of approximately \$5 million. According to Defense's 1997 report, FVAP received approximately \$51 million worth of public service advertising involving local and national broadcast and print media outlets during the 1996 election season. According to the report, Defense FVAP outreach was sponsored in conjunction with the Advertising Council of New York and a host of NGOs.

**Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs should plan, program, structure, fund, and implement the Department's Federal Voter Assistance Program to improve global and local outreach efforts in coordination with the Department of Defense Federal Voter Assistance Program Office, the Department's Bureau of Public Affairs, the Department's Office of Public Diplomacy, and those nongovernmental organizations partnering with the Department in meeting the absentee voter assistance needs of nonmilitary American citizens abroad.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs concurs with this recommendation. (See Appendix E.)



**Most Voting Assistance Officers Lack Training**

Only 18 of 136 posts responding to OIG's absentee voting survey indicated their VAOs had received Defense FVAP training. In 2000, the Defense FVAP office scheduled visits to 62 sites. Of those, 29 sites were abroad, and 11 of those were Department posts. Defense FVAP officials visited 9 posts and 1 NGO providing training to 129 people including private citizens, NGO volunteers, and post VAOs. The Defense FVAP web site contains a PowerPoint training presentation for VAOs; however, none of the post VAOs visited and only one VAO surveyed indicated they viewed the presentation.

OIG found that VAO training is included in the ACS module of the Basic Consular Affairs training course as part of a 1-hour introduction to ACS and nonemergency services. A Foreign Service Institute official described the VAO training as minimal, having no curriculum plan. Part of the hour of instruction on ACS services is an overview of the *Voting Assistance Guide*, obtaining voting materials, and notarization procedures. The Foreign Service Institute official assessed as overkill an OIG suggestion that a Defense FVAP instructor be invited to teach that block of instruction. The Department's VAO, however, stated the best VAOs at posts were FVAP-trained, and he recommended that Defense FVAP conduct VAO training for the Department.

Most untrained VAOs stated that they were able to provide sufficient information and assistance to absentee voters abroad by reviewing the *Voting Assistance Guide* and calling Defense FVAP or local election officials with specific absentee voting questions. Post VAOs that received FVAP training described the training as invaluable. Both trained and untrained post VAOs and their FSN assistants lauded the *Voting Assistance Guide* as their most effective voter assistance tool. That sentiment was also shared by NGO voting assistance volunteers, who told OIG that they had received FVAP training.

OIG found that FSN voting assistants averaged 22 years of service and had received FVAP training in one or more sessions since 1976. One VAO cautioned, however, that FSNs need to be included in any Department FVAP training initiatives because they are relied upon to provide accurate absentee voter information. His own FSN voting assistant had not received formal FVAP training in 10 years. VAOs compared the role of providing FVAP voter registration and absentee ballot forms to providing IRS tax forms. "The post gives out IRS forms but does not give tax advice. A trained

## UNCLASSIFIED

IRS representative comes to post and provides tax return advice. With the FVAP, we VAOs have to give out advice and therefore need the training.” OIG believes that with the huge majority of overseas voters now shifted to the Department’s responsibility, it needs to train FVAP instructors. These instructors can conduct or assist Defense FVAP instructors in conducting FVAP training for post VAOs and their assistants, and NGO volunteer voting assistants.

**Recommendation 2:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs should identify the voting assistance officer training needs for the Department’s Federal Voter Assistance Program, and, in coordination with the Director of the Foreign Service Institute and the Department of Defense Federal Voter Assistance Program Office, plan, program, fund, and implement a Department of State voter assistance training program for instructors and voting assistance officers and their assistants. Those Bureau of Consular Affairs Federal Voter Assistance Program instructors should be used to train nongovernmental organization volunteers and private citizens abroad to be absentee voting assistants.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs concurs with this recommendation. (See Appendix E.)

### Mailing Absentee Voting Forms

Most absentee voting forms completed by U.S. absentee voters abroad are returned to the United States by mail. Some potential pitfalls of mailing absentee voting forms to and from voters abroad are: 1) the lengthy transit time of some overseas mailings prevents both voters and election officials from receiving voting forms on time, and 2) the requirement of some state election officials that voting forms must contain an overseas postmark may cause some absentee ballots to be disqualified. OIG believes that improved outreach efforts by the Department should educate overseas American citizens about their opportunity to vote, mailing absentee voting forms to ensure on-time arrival, and assure voters that absentee votes are counted.

## UNCLASSIFIED

### ***Express Mail Service: Fastest Way of Returning Ballots to the United States***

All of the posts OIG visited stated that DHL, a U.S. express mail company, offered to return American citizen absentee ballots to the United States free of charge. Most of the posts surveyed by OIG used DHL. However, some used Federal Express for a combined express mail ballot return rate of 36 percent. OIG questionnaire results from posts visited indicate that 21 percent of private citizens overseas and 14 percent of Government citizens overseas used DHL/Federal Express to return their ballots to the United States. A DHL European regional director informed OIG that the service DHL provided varied by country and in some cases by city. Some DHL operations accepted absentee ballots at each office location and picked up ballots deposited at an embassy or consulate, some at DHL office locations only, and others from an embassy or consulate only. The director admitted there were some internal communication problems within DHL. He explained their services were provided with the stipulation that delivery was guaranteed for those ballots mailed with DHL by November 1, 2000. The director explained that for those ballots accepted after November 1, however, the company could not guarantee postmarks and arrival dates. He stated that once DHL transported ballots to the United States, they were transferred to the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) for delivery to election officials.

A USPS official informed OIG that USPS does not postmark postage-paid mail, such as absentee ballots, because there are no stamps that require cancellation. Also, the USPS plant manager for the New York International Service Center stated that once received in the international service center, military and international mail is treated as domestic first class mail, and, because the center is not an originating facility, they do not postmark any type of mail. OIG concluded, therefore, that lack of postmarks was a problem for some ballots mailed through DHL.

OIG learned that 15 states have extended deadlines where the requirement for an overseas postmark could become an issue. Extended deadlines for absentee ballots permit absentee ballots from abroad to arrive after election day and be counted. A number of NGOs, including Democrats Abroad and American Citizens Abroad, recommended postmark/date stamp requirements be eliminated by uniformly fixing the deadline for receipt of ballots on election day. They also recommended limiting authentication requirements for absentee ballots to just the voter's signature, dated and witnessed. OIG believes that making this change would resolve

## UNCLASSIFIED

postmark problems for not only DHL mailings, but also for military post offices (MPO) and the Department's diplomatic pouch system.

The DHL director described the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs as uncooperative in advertising DHL's free absentee balloting services on a global basis. He stated that DHL and the Department had no formal agreement or contract for absentee ballot services. He explained, however, that they cooperated in providing local outreach notifications about the service, and in some cases posts were absentee ballot collection and dispatch points. He described the coordination with local embassy and consulate VAOs and NGO voting assistants as great. OIG found that the Department's chief VAO does not conduct global absentee voter outreach initiatives. He explained that DHL's request for the Department to globally announce its free service was denied because the Department does not advertise for private enterprises. OIG supports that position; however, OIG believes that the Department needs to conduct Bureau of Consular Affairs-based absentee voter outreach. The Bureau's outreach initiatives should include not only information on the voting services provided by the Department, but also the services provide by NGOs partnering with the Department. The Department's chief VAO agreed with OIG that Department-level voter outreach is needed. As an NGO in this case, providing free express mail service to American voters abroad, DHL estimates that over 10,000 absentee ballots were returned to the United States using its express services. (See Recommendation 1.)

### ***Military Postal System Support Worked Well***

According to the Department's chief of the mail and pouch system, 57 posts receive direct MPO service. All the MPOs OIG visited postmarked absentee ballots and had average first class mail (ballot) transit times of 3 to 7 days. MPO supervisors at the 5 posts visited informed OIG that approximately 7,100 absentee ballots were mailed to the United States. There were seven ballots returned to their overseas sender. In those cases MPO supervisors determined the cause of the returns was bar coding on the reverse side of an absentee ballot. Election officials mailed some ballots containing the absentee voters name, address, and a USPS routing bar code on the reverse side of the ballot envelope. If the bar code is not blackened out by the voter or an overseas mail handler, USPS mail routing machinery in the United States could inadvertently read the reverse side resulting in the ballot's being returned to the voter instead of being forwarded to election officials. MPO and post mailroom personnel interviewed estimated that two-thirds of the absentee ballots from Florida contained bar codes on both sides of the ballots.

## UNCLASSIFIED

The posts OIG visited had onsite MPO services. OIG questionnaire results indicate that private citizens overseas used the MPO only 5 percent of the time, with international mail the preferred system at 53 percent. U.S. Government citizens employed overseas used the MPO for 64 percent of absentee ballot mailings. All MPO personnel OIG interviewed were aware that any American citizen abroad could mail absentee voting materials to the United States using the MPO system, with or without postage affixed, including American citizens not otherwise authorized to use an MPO. OIG found, however, that VAOs and most NGOs advising American citizens of the absentee voting process were unaware of the unrestricted use of an MPO for mailing absentee voting material back to the United States. One embassy visited provided exceptional service to its absentee voters by providing postage for ballot mailings to those election districts that did not have prepaid permits on their ballots. OIG provided VAOs a copy of the *Defense Mail Manual* section outlining use of the MPO for all absentee voting materials. OIG believes that improving the Department's voting assistance training and outreach could correct those problems.

GAO recently testified that their limited review of the military postal system and postmarking procedures after the 2000 election did not indicate that either missing postmarks or the lack of timeliness of mail delivery represented a systemic problem. (See Recommendations 1 and 2.)

### ***Diplomatic Pouch Used Least to Mail Ballots***

Mailroom supervisors at post that have MPO services told OIG that they did not use the Department's pouch system to mail absentee voting materials to the United States. Of those posts surveyed by OIG, 23 percent used the pouch system. Mailroom supervisors and VAOs stated the average transit time for diplomatic pouch varied from 1 to 5 weeks. Of the 55 posts using the diplomatic pouch to return absentee ballots, none reported problems with postmarking or getting the ballots to election officials on time. However, 15 posts recommended improving the diplomatic pouch system by authorized use of a date stamp or postmark.

According to the Department's chief of the mail and pouch system, unclassified pouch mail, like absentee ballots, is delivered as airfreight from abroad and processed at the Department's Dulles International Airport facility. Mail to be forwarded through USPS is dispatched to a USPS facility in Sterling, Virginia, for postmarking and routing to its end destination. As noted earlier in this report,

## UNCLASSIFIED

USPS does not postmark postage-paid mail like most absentee ballots, and those absentee ballots permitted by election officials to arrive after election day require an overseas postmark. The Department's chief of the mail and pouch system stated that posts receiving mail services solely by diplomatic pouch have no means or authority to postmark mail. Neither does the Department's Dulles pouch processing facility.

The pouch official told OIG that the Department received the authority to test the feasibility of creating State Post Offices (SPO) in 39 U.S.C. 413 (1990). An SPO would operate through agreement with USPS like an MPO, including the authority and requirement to postmark all outgoing mail. A November 1992 Bureau of Information Resource Management study concluded that establishing SPOs was not cost effective. Based, however, on the continuing closure of military installations and MPOs abroad, and the increasing cost of airfreight, the Department announced on March 20, 2001, that it will commission another study to analyze the feasibility of establishing SPOs at U.S. embassies and consulates overseas. The study will be completed in 2002, and will focus on creating SPOs at only those posts without MPO services. OIG believes establishing SPOs would be an outstanding quality of life enhancement for the Department and other Government agency personnel working at our posts that currently do not have MPO services. An SPO's ability to postmark absentee ballots would be an added benefit.

The Department's pouch official informed OIG that the cost of the SPO study would not be increased if the issue of USPS authorized use of postmarks or date stamps on diplomatic pouch mail were to be added. The postmark or date stamp authorization for post mail and pouch sections was discussed with OIG as an alternative should the current SPO study prove that establishing SPOs is not cost effective. The Department's pouch official agreed with OIG that authorized postmarks on diplomatic pouch mail would be both a quality of life enhancement for many Department employees and an absentee voting benefit for American citizens abroad. The Department's Bureau of Administration, Office of Logistics Management, has agreed to add postmark authorization to its SPO feasibility study. As noted earlier in this report, OIG believes the best solution for overseas postmark requirements on absentee ballots is the American Citizens Abroad and Democrats Abroad proposal for states to eliminate the postmark requirement and stipulate that all absentee ballots from abroad be delivered by election day.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Lessons Learned**

Only 6 of 136 posts responding to OIG's absentee voting survey wrote lessons learned after the 2000 Federal elections. All posts OIG visited established continuity files on voter assistance. The two most common problems reported by post VAOs and their FSN assistants were voters registering to vote and not receiving their ballots at all or in time to vote (77 posts), and over 100 voters arriving at 33 different posts on election day wanting to vote at the embassy or consulate. One Florida election supervisor notified a Department absentee voter that his Federal write-in absentee ballot was received for the November 7, 2000, general election but was rejected as illegal by the canvassing board because the witness signing the ballot did not give his or her address. The witness on the absentee ballot was a Department official. The Department uses its official seal to denote its address (Embassy of the United States and the location) on absentee ballots, including a responsible officer's signature and date.

The Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs guidance on required reports and voting assistance (7 FAM 080 and 1520) contains no requirement for post-election lessons learned. However 7 FAM 1571 encourages posts to suggest ways to improve the voting program and the information material disseminated by the Department. OIG found the Department's guidelines, published in 1993, need updating. The *Foreign Affairs Manual* indicates that:

- the Department's VAO is assigned to CA/OCS/CCS; however, his office is CA/OCS/ACS/AF,
- the only option provided for contacting Defense FVAP is a mailing address; however, toll-free numbers and a web site are available,
- a special note on the State of Connecticut not being required to accept a Federal write-in absentee ballot changed in 1996, and
- the *Foreign Affairs Manual* fails to specify that the Federal post card application and Federal write-in ballot can be mailed postage free (as well as postage paid) in the United States, from an APO or FPO, and through a diplomatic pouch facility abroad.

Additionally, the 7 FAM 1545 guidance to consular officers states they *may* accept Federal post card applications and Federal write-in ballots for mailing through APO/FPO and by diplomatic pouch. OIG believes that guidance should be changed to more accurately state that consular officers *will* accept these applications and

## UNCLASSIFIED

ballots, or any state's absentee balloting material, for mailing through an APO/FPO or by diplomatic pouch. OIG also noted that the FAM needs updated information on reporting FVAP fraud, waste, abuse, or mismanagement to the OIG hotline.

VAOs informed OIG that they do not have access to a list of officers designated as VAOs to share lessons learned, best practices, or training techniques. VAOs therefore rely on and create VAO continuity files after each election season. Some of the best practices OIG observed were: creation of an information unit that fielded over 5,000 calls and web site queries for absentee voter assistance, a VAO having the post print shop reproduce state-by-state sections (500 each) of the *Voting Assistance Guide* for quick responses to American citizen requests for information, a VAO developing a spreadsheet with state-by-state information on election deadline dates, and annual Fourth of July celebrations that included voter registration facilities. OIG believes that those best practices could be posted on the Bureau of Consular Affairs Best Practices web site, accessed by post VAOs, and used Departmentwide as FVAP outreach initiatives in the future.

**Recommendation 3:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs should review and update Volume 7 of the Foreign Affairs Manual to include a requirement that Department Federal Voter Assistance Program lessons learned be compiled, addressed, and disseminated to posts by the Department's voting assistance staff. The revision should incorporate needed corrections identified in this report. Additionally, information on reporting fraud, waste, abuse, or mismanagement in the Department's Federal Voter Assistance Program to the Office of Inspector General, with the address, hotline number, and web site address, should be added to Volume 7 of the Foreign Affairs Manual.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs concurs with this recommendation. (See Appendix E.)

### ***Department Can Improve Defense FVAP Survey Data Collection***

OIG observed a post best practice for the collection of Defense FVAP survey data. The Department participates in the Defense FVAP post-election survey, which captures voter participation and satisfaction with the absentee voting process. Approximately 40 posts participated in the 2000 FVAP survey by mailing from 100 to



## UNCLASSIFIED

300 surveys each to local absentee voters. A recurring response problem with the FVAP survey is that the Department's chief VAO randomly selects FVAP survey participants for each post from American citizen Warden System registration data. Post VAOs told OIG that because the Department's Warden System does not require American citizens to notify the post when they leave country, the response rate for FVAP surveys has been as low as 20 to 30 percent. Additionally, VAOs informed OIG that mailing FVAP surveys by in-country international mail cost thousands of dollars.

One post VAO told OIG that they were congratulated by the Department's VAO and Defense FVAP for their high 1996 FVAP survey return rate of over 90 percent. The VAO told OIG that rate was obtained by randomly selecting American citizens visiting the post for other ACS services, and asking them to complete the FVAP survey while they waited in the lobby. Another post also used this practice for the 2000 FVAP survey, and all other VAOs OIG visited (and three surveyed) recommended that means of obtaining FVAP survey results. The VAOs stated the change would be both a cost savings and increased return rate measure. OIG believes that posts randomly selecting Defense FVAP survey participants is a best practice that should be shared on the Bureau of Consular Affairs Best Practices web site and used Departmentwide for future FVAP surveys.

### **Improving the Federal Absentee Voter Assistance Program**

Most VAOs and NGOs stated the best method for solving absentee voter problems overseas is to allow voting through the Internet. One VAO commented that banks use e-transactions, so that should be safe enough for voting. An absentee voter in Germany cited filing taxes on-line as a parallel to being able to securely vote on-line. Voting through the Internet or by fax was the number 6 recommended improvement by posts surveyed by OIG. (See Appendix C.) GAO recently testified that according to some Defense and state election officials, security and privacy issues pose challenges to widespread use of the Internet for casting votes. GAO is reviewing technology issues, such as Internet voting, as part of their ongoing work on election issues. Perhaps highlighting the frustrations of American citizens abroad is that the second most recommended improvement by NGOs was voting at a U.S. embassy or consulate.

VAOs stated the Department needed to play a bigger role in the FVAP because the Department now has the largest absentee voter

## UNCLASSIFIED

population base. An FSN voting assistant provided OIG 1986 statistics of 6,000 absentee voters supported by that post and year 2000 population figures of over 200,000 American citizens supported by post. All VAOs contacted agreed that Defense was doing a good job with FVAP; however, they stated the Department needed to play a larger role than it has, primarily in the form of headquarters-level outreach and funding for local outreach. American citizens coming to post too late to register and vote and those that came to post on election day to vote were the primary indicators VAOs provided OIG that more outreach is needed. The Department's role and recommended FVAP implementation improvements have been addressed in this report.

Several NGOs publishing proposals for electoral reforms affecting overseas citizens cited a major public relations problem is the perception that the overseas absentee vote is primarily military. The Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas proposes better statistical data be provided by the FEC on the numbers of military and civilian overseas voters, and the number of registration applications and ballots received and rejected by state. OIG believes those statistics, adding where the overseas voters reside by country, would aid the Department in targeting its outreach efforts and improving its FVAP assistance to American citizens abroad. Both VAOs and NGOs stated that the Federal post card application could be improved by having election officials agree to wave the notarization requirements, making the print larger, redesigning the county and state information line because it is easily missed, and adding a block for requesting only a Federal Election ballot. Both VAOs and NGOs recommended the Defense FVAP create both a consolidated, and a state-by-state, quick reference spreadsheet(s) in the *Voting Assistance Guide*. Of 12 NGOs that took part in OIG voter group discussions, 4 had developed a spreadsheet containing consolidated *Voting Assistance Guide* information for each state. These views and recommendations are being considered in ongoing reviews of UOCAVA.

UNCLASSIFIED

# List of Recommendations

---

**Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs should plan, program, structure, fund, and implement the Department's Federal Voter Assistance Program to improve global and local outreach efforts in coordination with the Department of Defense Federal Voter Assistance Program Office, the Department's Bureau of Public Affairs, the Department's Office of Public Diplomacy, and those nongovernmental organizations partnering with the Department in meeting the absentee voter assistance needs of nonmilitary American citizens abroad.

**Recommendation 2:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs should identify the Department's Federal Voter Assistance Program voting assistance officer training needs, and, in coordination with the Director of the Foreign Service Institute and the Department of Defense Federal Voter Assistance Program Office, plan, program, fund, and implement a Department of State voter assistance training program for instructors and voting assistance officers and their assistants. Those Bureau of Consular Affairs Federal Voter Assistance Program instructors should be used to train nongovernmental organization volunteers and private citizens abroad to be absentee voting assistants.

**Recommendation 3:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs should review and update Volume 7 of the Foreign Affairs Manual to include a requirement that Department Federal Voter Assistance Program lessons learned be compiled, addressed, and disseminated to posts by the Department's voting assistance staff. The revision should incorporate needed corrections identified in this report. Additionally, information on reporting fraud, waste, abuse, or mismanagement in the Department's Federal Voter Assistance Program to the Office of Inspector General, with the address, hotline number, and web site address, should be added to Volume 7 of the Foreign Affairs Manual.

**Appendix A - Summary Sheet American Overseas Citizens Questionnaire**  
 (Used at 6 Posts – Frankfurt, London, Paris, Rome, Tel Aviv, and Tokyo)

Number of Respondents: 66  
 Number of Focus Groups: 16  
 Number of Posts: 6

The data provided represents the highest 3 percentages for selected responses to a given absentee voting question. (Satisfaction - includes both Satisfied and Somewhat Satisfied responses.)

Q1A. Number of Times Voted Absentee?

- R1. 5 or More times - 42%
- R2. 3 to 4 times - 21%

Q1B. Registered to Vote in 2000?

- R1. Yes - 94%
- R2. No - 06%

Q1C. Voted in 2000 Election?

- R1. Absentee - 80%
- R2. In Person - 11%

Q1D. State of Residence?

- R1. New York - 17%
- R2. California - 13%
- R3. Texas - 13%

Q1E. Month Requested Absentee Ballot?

- R1. July or Earlier - 38%
- R2. September - 24%

Q1F. Used Federal Write-In Ballot?

- R1. No - 83%
- R2. Yes - 16%

Q2A. Aware of Federal Voter Assistance Program (FVAP) Web site?

- R1. Unaware - 39%
- R2. Fully Aware - 33%

Q2B. Aware of FVAP Guide?

- R1. Fully Aware - 50%
- R2. Unaware - 26%

Q2C. Aware FVAP Toll Free Number?

- R1. Unaware - 61%
- R2. Fully Aware - 26%

Q3A. Satisfaction with FVAP Web site?

- R1. Did Not Use - 59%
- R2. Satisfaction - 32%

Q3B. Satisfaction with FVAP Guide?

- R1. Satisfaction - 52%
- R2. Did Not Use - 34%

Q3C. Satisfaction with FVAP Toll Free Phone Number?

- R1. Did Not Use - 85%
- R2. Satisfaction - 13%

Q4A. Received Assistance from a Voting Assistance Officer (VAO)?

- R1. No - 58%
- R2. Yes - 42%

Q4B. Satisfied with VAO Availability?

- R1. Satisfaction - 75%
- R2. Dissatisfaction - 14%

Q4C. Satisfied with VAO Knowledge?

- R1. Satisfaction - 83%
- R2. Dissatisfaction - 08%
- R3. Did Not Use - 08%

Q4D. Satisfied with VAO Materials?

- R1. Satisfaction - 83%
- R2. Did Not Use - 17%

Q5. Absentee Ballot Mailed Via?

- R1. International Mail - 53%
- R2. DHL/FedEx - 21%

**Appendix B - Summary Sheet U.S. Government Employees Overseas Questionnaire**  
 (Used at 6 Posts – Frankfurt, London, Paris, Rome, Tel Aviv, and Tokyo)

Number of Respondents: 59 (State-71% / Other Fed Agency-17% / Family-10% / DoD-2%)  
 Number of Focus Groups: 9  
 Number of Posts: 6

The data provided represents the highest 2 percentages for selected responses to a given absentee voting question. (Satisfaction - includes both Satisfied and Somewhat Satisfied responses.)

Q1A. Number of Times Voted Absentee?	Q3A. Satisfaction with FVAP Web site?
R1. 5 or More times - 34%	R1. Did Not Use - 67%
R2. 3 to 4 times - 29%	R2. Satisfaction - 32%
Q1B. Registered to Vote in 2000?	Q3B. Satisfaction with <i>FVAP Guide</i> ?
R1. Yes - 91%	R1. Satisfaction - 51%
R2. No - 09%	R2. Did Not Use - 47%
Q1C. Voted in 2000 Election?	Q3C. Satisfaction with FVAP Toll Free Phone Number?
R1. Absentee - 76%	R1. Did Not Use - 89%
R2. Did Not Vote - 20%	R2. Satisfaction - 11%
Q1D. State of Residence?	Q4A. Knew Voting Assist Officer (VAO)?
R1. Virginia - 24%	R1. Yes - 61%
R2. Florida - 18%	R2. No - 39%
R3. California - 09%	
Q1E. Month Requested Absentee Ballot?	Q4B. Satisfied with VAO Availability?
R1. July or Earlier - 32%	R1. Satisfaction - 85%
R2. No Request - 19%	R2. Did Not Use - 12%
R3. September - 17%	
Q1F. Used Federal Write-In Ballot?	Q4C. Satisfied with VAO Knowledge?
R1. No - 85%	R1. Satisfaction - 75%
R2. Yes - 14%	R2. Did Not Use - 19%
Q2A. Aware of Federal Voter Assistance Program (FVAP) Web site?	Q4D. Satisfied with VAO Materials?
R1. Unaware - 40%	R1. Satisfaction - 78%
R2. Partly Aware - 31%	R2. Did Not Use - 12%
Q2B. Aware of <i>FVAP Guide</i> ?	Q4E. Received Voting Briefing/Training?
R1. Fully Aware - 49%	R1. No - 83%
R2. Partly Aware - 29%	R2. Yes - 17%
Q2C. Aware FVAP Toll Free Number?	Q6. Absentee Ballot Mailed Via?
R1. Unaware - 72%	R1. APO/FPO - 64%
R2. Fully/Partly - 14% each	R2. DHL/FedEx - 14%
	R3. Don't Know - 10%
	R4. State Pouch - 05%

**Appendix C – Summary Sheet Department of State  
Federal Voter Assistance Program Surveys  
(Sent to All Posts)**

Post Surveyed: 216  
 Total Embassy and Consulate Responses: 136  
     Subtotal of All Embassy Responses: 90  
     Subtotal of All Consulate Responses: 45  
     Subtotal of U.S. Mission Responses: 01  
 Total Embassies/Consulates/Missions Not Responding: 80  
 Total Response Rate: 63%

The following is a summary/analysis of the Department's FVAP Survey:

- A. Q. Does your post have a VAO?  
 R. Yes - 127      No - 07      N/A - 02
- B. Q. Did your VAO receive training, emphasis on FVAP training?  
 R. Yes - 18      No - 112      N/A - 06
- C. Q. Did you receive sufficient voter assistance material?  
 R. Yes - 116      No - 16      N/A - 04      Ran out & resupplied - 08
- D. Q. Did your post provide preelection voter assistance?  
 R. Yes - 128      No - 06      N/A - 02      Warden System  
 Not Used - 47      4th of July registration - 13      Est. number of voters  
 assisted - 21,610      Challenge - Angry voters having missed registration  
 deadlines
- E. Q. Did overseas voters bring to your attention preelection problem areas?  
 R. Yes - 97      No - 34      N/A - 05      Late or no ballot - 61  
 Wanted to vote at post: number of posts - 19      Est. number of voters - 60
- F. Q. Did overseas voters bring to you attention post-election problem areas?  
 R. Yes - 58      No - 65      N/A - 15      Postmarking concerns - 10  
 Did vote count - 09      No ballot received - 16  
 Wanted to vote at post: number of posts - 14      Est. number of voters - 53
- G. Q. Did your post participate in the FVAP survey for 2000?  
 R. Yes - 32      No - 98      N/A - 06      Low return rates - 02
- H. Q. Did post compile lessons learned?  
 R. Yes - 06      No - 123      N/A - 02      Prepared Continuity  
 Files - 05

## Appendix C - Continued

- I. Q. How were ballots for your post sent to the United States?  
Note: Most posts used more than one mail delivery system.
- R. DHL/Federal Express - 86  
Military Postal System - 57  
Diplomatic Pouch - 55  
International Mail - 35  
Hand-Carried to United States - 05
- J. Q. What recommendations does post have for improving the FVAP?
- R. 1. More Department/local warden outreach/outreach funding - 57
2. Motivated Department VAO, FVAP expert/training coordinator/  
lessons learned/web site host/frequently asked questions/1 POC - 45
3. FVAP all states summary page and summary sheets for each state  
with points of contact and deadline dates for quick reference - 32
4. Training needed for VAO and FSN Assistant -30
5. Standardize and simplify Federal post card application and Federal write-  
in absentee ballot with the same information required for every state - 27
6. FAX and/or Internet registration and voting for all states - 26
7. Clarify Department policy on mailing absentee voting material,  
including postmarking and who pays postage - 21
8. Have state voting official send ballots on time and standardize  
ballot due date to the date polls close - 17
9. Improve the Diplomatic Pouch System with authorized use of  
date stamps or postmarkings - 15
10. Improve FVAP absentee voter material turn-around time - 13
11. Department guidance on free express mail services for DHL and  
Federal Express was very late. Department needs these NGO's  
services and needs to make them part of outreach - 11
12. Clarify proof of residence requirements, especially for American  
citizens that have never lived or have not lived in the United States for  
years - 10

### Appendix C - Continued

13. Eliminate notarization requirements - 06
14. Department and Defense FVAP need better coordination on FVAP training visits to posts - 07
15. Have Defense FVAP provide outreach funds to the Department/posts - 04
16. Each post should have web site with absentee voter information - 04
17. Use Election.com as an absentee voter information source - 04
18. Authorize and fund temporary hires for voter assistance duties - 04
19. FVAP survey methodology flawed, low response rate, give at post - 03
20. An FVAP guide in Spanish - 01
21. Voter registration for all states at posts - 01





## Overseas Absentee Ballot Questionnaire —U.S. Overseas Citizens



### Concerns About This Questionnaire

**Will my questionnaire responses be kept anonymous?** Yes. There is no information being collected that could be used to identify individuals. Your responses will be combined with information from other locations overseas to report the views and experiences of groups of people. Do not use any personal names anywhere on this questionnaire.

**Why me?** Embassies and consulates have been selected to collect information from overseas citizens regarding the overseas absentee ballot process. Information collected in this questionnaire will be used to report awareness and satisfaction with the overseas absentee ballot voting process. Your responses are important to provide us with insights into this process.

### Disclosure Notice

**Disclosure:** Providing information on this questionnaire is voluntary. There is no penalty if you choose not to respond. However, maximum participation is encouraged. Your questionnaire form is anonymous. No identifying information is being collected that could identify individuals. Only summary information will be reported.

Public reporting burden for this collection is estimated to average 10 minutes per response, including time required reviewing existing data sources, gathering necessary data, providing the information required, and reviewing the final collection. Persons are not required to provide this information to Department of State representatives in the absence of a valid OMB approval number. Send comments on the accuracy of this estimate of the burden and recommendation for reducing it to: Department of State (A/RPS/DIR) Washington, D.C. 20520-1848

### Completing This Questionnaire

- This is not a test.
- Use a blue or black pen or dark pencil.
- Select answers that you believe are most appropriate.
- Fill in the appropriate circle or circles.

### Demographic & Voting Questions

- How many times have you voted absentee? *Fill in one circle.*

<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 3-4
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 5 or more
<input type="radio"/> 2	
- Were you aware of the voting and communication tools listed below? *Fill in one circle for each item.*

<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	a. The Federal Voting Assistance Program website that provides voting-related information and resources
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	b. The 2000-2001 Voting Assistance Guide that provides state by state information that enables you to register and vote absentee
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	c. The Federal Voting Assistance Program toll-free telephone service that allows a caller to talk with the Federal Voting Assistance Program Staff for voting information or assistance

APPENDIX D

3. Overall, how satisfied were you with the following voting information and communication tools during the November 2000 election? *Fill in one circle for each item.*



- a. The Federal Voting Assistance Program website that provides voting-related information and resources
- b. The 2000-2001 Voting Assistance Guide that provides state by state information that enables you to register and vote absentee
- c. The Federal Voting Assistance Program toll-free telephone service that allows a caller to talk with the Federal Voting Assistance Program Staff for voting information or assistance

4. For the November 2000 election, did you receive any verbal or written information from any organization concerning the absentee ballot registration and voting process? *Fill in one circle.*

- Yes  
 No

5. To what extent did you understand the absentee ballot process during the November 2000 election? *Fill in one circle.*

- Completely  
 Large extent  
 Moderate extent  
 Small extent  
 Not at all

6. Overall, how easy or difficult did you find the absentee voting process for the November 2000 election? *Fill in one circle.*

- I did not vote by absentee ballot in the November 2000 election
- Easy  
 Somewhat easy  
 Somewhat difficult  
 Difficult

7. Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs) are designated individuals who are required to provide accurate, non-partisan voting information and assistance to citizens who wish to vote. VAOs are found at embassies/consulates. Consular Officers are VAOs. Did you receive voting information or assistance from your embassy or consulate VAO? *Fill in one circle.*

- Yes  
 No → **SKIP TO QUESTION 9**

8. How satisfied were you with the performance of your Voting Assistance Officer in the following areas? *Fill in one circle for each item.*



- a. Availability to provide assistance  
     b. Knowledge of the election process  
     c. Provided materials upon request

9. Were you registered to vote in the November 2000 election? *Fill in one circle.*

- Yes  
 No → **SKIP TO QUESTION 11**

10. In what state or territory is your voting residence? *Spell out the name of the state or territory, do not use abbreviations.*

State or territory: \_\_\_\_\_

11. In what month did you request your absentee ballot? *Fill in one circle.*

- Did not request an absentee ballot  
 July or earlier  
 August  
 September  
 October  
 November  
 Do not recall

12. The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (Standard Form 186) is a back-up ballot used if you were overseas and you did not receive your regular absentee ballot. Did you use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot in the November 2000 Presidential Election? *Fill in one circle.*

- Yes  
 No  
 Don't know

APPENDIX D

12. The following are potential problems about the absentee ballot voting process. Which, if any, applied to you during the November 2000 election? *Fill in all circles that apply.*
- a. Voting procedures complicated
  - b. Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) confusing
  - c. No response/delayed response to FPCA
  - d. FPCA returned because it was not accepted by election officials
  - e. Having to submit FPCA twice to register and to request a ballot
  - f. Having to submit FPCA for primary and general elections
  - g. Having to complete FPCA and state registration forms
  - h. Absentee ballot confusing
  - i. Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) confusing
  - j. Voting assistance guide confusing
  - k. Not enough information on candidates issues
  - l. Difficulty in communicating about mailing address with local election officials
  - m. No way to know if election officials received FPCA
  - n. Difficult to locate FPCA or ballot returned
  - o. Absentee ballot arrived too late
  - p. Absentee ballot never arrived
  - q. Other—Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
  - r. I did not have any problems

14. Did you vote in the November 2000 election? *Fill in one circle.*
- a. Yes, I voted in person → **YOU ARE FINISHED; DO NOT ANSWER QUESTIONS 15, 16, OR 17.**
  - b. Yes, I voted by absentee ballot → **ANSWER QUESTION 17.**
  - c. No, I did not vote → **ANSWER QUESTIONS 17 AND 18.**

15. Which of the following were reasons why you did not vote in the November 2000 election? *Fill in all circles that apply.*
- a. I did not think I was eligible to vote
  - b. I did not know about the machine
  - c. I knew about the election, but was not interested in voting
  - d. I was not familiar with the candidates or issues
  - e. I had no candidate preference
  - f. I did not think my vote would matter
  - g. I did not know how to get an absentee ballot
  - h. I did not know my state of legal residence for voting
  - i. My absentee ballot arrived too late
  - j. My absentee ballot did not arrive at all
  - k. The requirement for possession of election materials was too difficult
  - l. I was discouraged by the process of absentee voting
  - m. I was concerned that voting might affect my Federal or State tax obligation
  - n. Other—Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

16. Of the reasons listed in Question 15, write the letter ("a" through "n") that was the most important reason that you did not vote in the November 2000 election. Letter corresponding to most important reason: \_\_\_\_\_  
**YOU ARE FINISHED; DO NOT ANSWER QUESTION 17.**

17. How was your absentee ballot forwarded to your local election official? *Fill in one circle.*
- a. International mail
  - b. State Department pouch
  - c. Military postal system (APO/FPO)
  - d. U.S. overnight delivery company (e.g., DHL or Federal Express)
  - e. Other U.S. military or consular system
  - f. Post Office
  - g. Other—Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix E



United States Department of State

Assistant Secretary of State  
for Consular Affairs

Washington, D.C. 20520

June 11, 2003

TO: OIG - Anne Sigmund, Acting

FROM: CA - Mary A. Ryan 

SUBJECT: CA Review of the OIG Draft Report on the Department's Federal Voting Assistance Program

CA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the OIG draft report of its review of the Department's implementation of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP). Members of our respective staffs have held productive discussions on the report and its recommendations.

We believe strongly that our overseas American citizen constituency should have the same access to voter information and the electoral process as Americans residing in the U.S. In partnership with the Department of Defense's Federal Voting Assistance Program staff, we have provided guidance, supplies and suggestions to our Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs) worldwide, and we laud the efforts of our VAOs in supporting this most fundamental right of citizenship.

We agree with the OIG report that the Department can do more to support outreach, training, and reporting efforts relating to our Voting Assistance Program. To that end, we have incorporated OIG's recommendations in the Bureau's Performance Plan and have requested the necessary staffing and funding levels to accomplish our goals.

CA supports the OIG recommendation that we work with DoD's FVAP and the Department's Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy Bureaus to expand global and local voter education outreach efforts on behalf of Americans overseas. We also agree that we should work with FBI and DoD to incorporate additional voting assistance training into existing DoD and Department training initiatives.

Finally, we will take the necessary steps to update our instructions relating to our voting assistance program. All of these initiatives, we believe, will do much to improve what we view as a vital service for the Bureau's overseas constituency.