



THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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UPR

MAR 17 2004

MEMORANDUM FOR CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
COMBATANT COMMANDERS

SUBJECT: Opportunity to Vote During the 2004 Elections

As the men and women of our Uniformed Services serve around the world defending democracy and freedom, we are reminded of our precious right as Americans to choose our national leaders. Today, more people around the world than ever before hold this most fundamental democratic right—the right to vote. This year, Americans at home and abroad will vote in elections to fill Federal, state and local offices. We will be voting to elect the President and Vice President, 34 U.S. Senators, the entire U.S. House of Representatives, 13 State Governors, and hundreds of local officials. The outcome of these elections will shape the nation's future.

For the men and women of our Uniformed Services, the opportunity to register and cast their ballots in the 2004 elections will depend significantly on the assistance and support they receive from Service and command voting programs and from the Voting Assistance Officers assigned to their units. Those serving overseas, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, and mobilized National Guard and Reserve units, will face the additional challenges of the availability of election information and materials and the lengthened time it takes to receive and return their absentee ballots through the mails. I want your support for the following:

- Ensure command support of the voting program at all levels of command. Personal involvement of commanders is crucial to effective implementation of the voting program. Assign quality officers the duty of Voting Assistance Officers and comment on their performance as a Voting Assistance Officer on their evaluation reports. Voting Assistance Officers must be given the time and resources needed for them to perform their duties effectively, including the opportunity to complete a Federal Voting Assistance Program Training Workshop.
- Publicize the identity and location of Voting Assistance Officers within each major command, on each installation, and within each unit. Service, command, installation and unit websites should maintain prominent voting information links for the benefit of Service members.



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- Service Voting Assistance Officers must establish and maintain a directory of major command and installation Voting Assistance Officers and have the means by which to effectively and rapidly communicate with them and their subordinates. I will be asking Dr. David Chu to meet with the Senior Service Voting Representatives regularly between now and election day to get updates and act quickly to resolve any problems.
- Voting materials, including the Federal Post Card Application and the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot must be distributed to all units, and unit Voting Assistance Officers must be aware of the availability of such materials. These materials are available in book form, on CD and on the Internet at <http://www.fvap.gov>. I want to ensure each Service member is handed the Federal Post Card Application and is offered assistance in completing the form if needed.
- Use your command and public information capabilities to support the September 2004 Armed Forces Voter's Week and designate other special days to inform members and families of absentee voter registration and voting procedures ensuring that all voters are registered to vote by the end of September. I want each of you to designate the week of October 11-15th as Absentee Voting Week. If overseas voters complete and mail their ballots by October 15, their votes will reach any precinct in time to be counted.

We will not recommend any party or candidate. Our mission is to ensure every Service member and their families have the opportunity to vote in the appropriate Primary, Special, Runoff and General Elections and to ensure that their votes are counted.

Voting is both a privilege and a responsibility of citizens in a democracy. It is our responsibility, as leaders of the Armed Services, to do everything we can to ensure that our Service members and their families exercise their right to vote.

