

WASHINGTON – Today, the Committee on House Administration’s Elections Subcommittee held a hearing on the failing efforts to address obstacles currently disenfranchising thousands of military voters, and legislative solutions – specifically, the Military Voting Protection (MVP) Act – that will protect the rights of our troops serving abroad.

At today’s hearing, the Subcommittee’s Ranking Member, Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., who recently reintroduced the MVP Act – bipartisan legislation designed to expedite the transportation of military absentee ballots – pledged his continued commitment to ending the disenfranchisement of military voters. “It is time for Congress to step in and fulfill its obligation to ensure that the troops we send abroad to protect our rights are able to exercise theirs,” McCarthy said. “The breadth of this problem is complex, but we can work to make immediate improvements right now with a simple bipartisan solution: ensuring completed ballots are received and counted through express mail delivery.”

“The privilege of voting in this country has been protected by the tremendous sacrifices of our men and women in uniform,” added Subcommittee member Gregg Harper, R-Miss. “This common sense legislation will help ensure that our soldiers’ ballots are properly collected, transported and tracked as they are delivered from around the world,”

Witnesses testifying before the Subcommittee included, Gail McGinn, the Department of Defense’s Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and Jessie Jane Duff, a retired Gunnery Sergeant for the United States Marine Corps.

According to McGinn, the Department of Defense has improved educational outreach by utilizing a variety of communications media to inform military personnel about voting procedures. In her testimony, McGinn stated that, “outreach efforts have been designed with redundancy to reach all members, whether at headquarters staff, at a military installation, or in a foxhole in Afghanistan or Iraq.”

However, Duff – who spent 20 years on active duty – suggested that current efforts to assist military personnel are insufficient and unlikely to help those serving overseas. In her testimony, she criticized the absence of registration and absentee voting assistance at military installations. **“The effort to enable military to pay their taxes on time is remarkable,”** Duff stated. **“On the other hand, the effort to enable military members’ their right to vote on how those tax**

dollars are spent is deplorable.”

According to Duff, in addition to installing voter registration and absentee ballot request locations at each military installation, the Department should also utilize express mail to expedite ballot delivery, and provide enhanced training to voting teams that assist personnel with absentee ballots.

Background

Last week, Rep. Kevin McCarthy, Ranking Member on the House Administration Elections Subcommittee, along with Rep. Dan Boren, D-Okla., reintroduced the Military Voting Protection (MVP) Act, and vowed to take additional steps to prevent military personnel from being left out of the election process.

Data on the disenfranchisement of military voters was highlighted in a 2007 report by the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) on the 2006 elections. The EAC's report stated that 23% of all rejected absentee ballots sent to uniformed and overseas citizens were rejected because they were returned after deadlines stipulated by state law. Subsequent data on military voting has painted an even darker picture for our troops overseas. According to a 2009 report conducted by the PEW Center on the States, only 26% of the absentee ballots requested by military personnel were actually cast in the 2006 election.

If adopted, the MVP Act would require the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) to provide for the collection, expedited transportation, and tracking of the absentee ballots of military voters serving overseas. The legislation would also require FVAP to report back to Congress on the effectiveness of its collection and delivery system within 180 days of each general election.

McCarthy is also working on additional legislation that would streamline and reform military

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voting procedures so that servicemen and servicewomen abroad can receive their absentee ballots without delay.

For more information, please contact the Committee press office at (202) 225-8281 .