

Rep. Maloney  
OVAB Floor Statement on Amendment

Madam Chair, I have an amendment at the desk, amendment number 39.

Today, Mr. Honda and I offer an amendment that would establish an Overseas Voting Advisory Board to provide guidance and oversight to the Federal Voter Assistance Program or FVAP efforts to increase ballot access for military and overseas voters.

I would like to thank Chairman Skelton and the House Armed Services Committee for their hard work on this bill and for agreeing to consider this amendment.

The FVAP, which is part of the Department of Defense, is the government's primary entity for assisting overseas voters access the ballot.

While the State Department cannot give an exact number, there are estimated to be between 4 and 6 million American civilians living abroad.

There are also hundreds of thousands of brave men and women abroad from Afghanistan to Germany serving their country in the armed forces.

In recent election cycles, the FVAP has failed to bring about increased overseas voter participation and has done so at great cost to the taxpayer.

In 2004, the Integrated Voting Assistance System (IVAS) created by the FVAP cost \$576,000, with only 17 overseas voters participating.

In 2006, the FVAP did even worse by spending \$1.1 million on the IVAS that accounted for an abysmal 8 votes traced to the system.

In 2008, the FVAP website to help active duty members of the military vote wasn't active until July, just four months prior to the November election.

Every American has the right to vote, but what is most disappointing to me is the disenfranchisement of our men and women in the armed forces.

From July 23 through November 4, 2008, of the roughly 1.6 million service members across the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps, only 780 service members requested ballots through the FVAP.

This is disgraceful and disrespectful to the sacrifices made by our fighting men and women.

Normally, there is public and Congressional attention to the issues facing overseas civilian and military voters just ahead of major elections.

Regrettably, this comes too late to overcome the obstacles and actually help overseas military and civilians vote.

Mr. Honda and I have offered this amendment to address the issues to overseas military and civilian voting now, before the next election occurs.

This panel will provide oversight for a federal program that has struggled in its mission to ensure greater ballot access for Americans living overseas

The FVAP's longtime Director resigned her post in late 2008. At that time, it appeared that the next Director would be chosen in a closed process and that the same failed policies of the previous Director would simply be continued forever.

In December 2008, I sent a letter to Defense Secretary Robert Gates urging him to conduct a fair and open hiring process for the next FVAP Director.

I am pleased that Secretary Gates did a national search and selected Mr. Robert Carey to be the next head of the FVAP.

I know Mr. Carey and respect his experience with election issues. I believe he will bring fresh ideas and workable solutions to improve ballot access for all Americans living abroad.

While Mr. Carey will certainly begin the long awaited and much needed overhaul of the FVAP, we cannot leave the job all to him.

By passing this amendment which will establish an oversight board, we can guarantee that the best policies are being pursued to provide better access to the ballot by bringing greater attention to the FVAP.

Thank you for considering this important amendment.

I urge a "yes" vote on this amendment.