Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy) Comments

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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FORCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

JUN 8 2001

MEMORANDUM FOR INSPECTOR GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Response to Evaluation Report on Overseas Absentee Ballot Handling in DoD (Project No. D2001LF-0058)

This office, in coordination with the Director of Administration and Management, reviewed recommendations and findings in the draft Evaluation Report on Overseas Absentee Ballot Handling in DoD. The Director of Administration and Management, through the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) administers the federal provisions of the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act*. The FVAP has a proven record of carrying out its responsibilities to meet the voting needs of our military and overseas citizens on a non-partisan basis. As mandated by the *Act*, the FVAP conducts a statistically based, random sample, survey after every presidential election. The FVAP will continue to make appropriate adjustments and improvements to the Program based on the findings of their 2000 post-election survey, customer feedback, and recommendations from the DoD IG.

Results of the FVAP 2000 post-election survey show that the voting participation rate for the Uniformed Services in the 2000 presidential election was higher than it has ever been in the history of the Program. This record high voting participation rate of 75% demonstrates the success of the Department's information and awareness program for absentee registration and voting. For example, the FVAP increased its emphasis on, and distribution of, the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot for Election 2000. In 1996, 82% of the survey respondents did not use the FWAB because they did not know about it; in Election 2000 that figure was reduced to 30%. Additionally, the Military Departments continue to improve their voting assistance programs. Comments received through the survey show the military members' overwhelming satisfaction with FVAP and Service voting programs. In 2000, only 7% of the survey respondents did not know who their voting assistance officer was, compared with 40% in 1996.

There are areas where we agree that implementation procedures and effectiveness can be improved for DoD-wide voting assistance services. The FVAP will redouble its training efforts for Service voting assistance officers and increase the focus on areas dealing with determining legal voting residence.

I concur with the recommendation that DoD Directive 1000.4 be revised to ensure that the Military Departments include the DoD Federal Voting Assistance Program requirements in their regulations. I also concur that the biennial DoD Voting Action Plan and the DoD Directive be consistent in establishing voting assistance officer training. That training will be a federal election year requirement.

I concur that the FVAP should continue to coordinate with state election officials to remedy absentee registration and voting problems. Based on the FVAP's successful application

of technology to the absentee voting process, the Department will continue to explore new technology applications for future elections to facilitate the absentee voting process for military, and U.S. citizens residing overseas. Detailed comments, descriptions and plans for implementation follow in the attachment.

For follow-on assistance, please contact Commander Yvette BrownWahler at (703) 697-9273 and Polli Brunelli, Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program at (703) 588-1584.

Charles S. Abell

Attachment: As stated.

cc: Director of Administration and Management

Recommendation Responses

1. Concur. The Director of Administration and Management will revise DoD Directive 1000.4, "Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) by September 30, 2001. The revised Directive will include guidance already in the FVAP's past Voting Action Plans. The biennial DoD Voting Action Plan 2002-2003 will be issued by early November. The FVAP will ensure that the Services' written policies include Unit Voting Assistance Officer support to all eligible serviced military and their family members including deployed, dispersed, and tenant organizations. Overseas installations will provide voting assistance to eligible overseas DoD civilian employees and their family members.

(2) Concur with alternative proposal. Due to the wide variation of mission, composition and size of military units, it is not feasible for the DA&M or the FVAP to prescribe a universal ratio of UVAOs to assisted members. The Services will determine an equitable ratio based on the size of the command and will include the ratio in Service policies.

b. Concur. The Voting Action Plan will be consistent with the Directive's requirements on the timing of training; i.e., during federal election years.

c. Concur. The FVAP will review Service plans and policies in support of the FVAP to ensure they are consistent with the DoD Directive and Voting Action Plan. This will include the following, some of which are Service support actions carried out in practice, but not formalized in their written policies:

1. Command support of the FVAP at all levels, from Service headquarters through individual units.
2. Assign, by billet, a uniformed O-7 Flag/General Officer as the Senior Service Voting Representative (SSVR), who is responsible for Service-wide implementation of the Voting Assistance Program.
3. Assign a Service Voting Action Officer (SVAO) to assist each Service's SSVR. The SVAO should be permanently assigned within the same organization as the SSVR and preferably be a civilian employee to provide continuity, at GS-12 or above. If assignment of a civilian employee is not feasible, a military member (O-4 or above or E-8 or above) should be assigned as SVAO. An assistant should be assigned to the SVAO during even-numbered years.
4. At each military installation or base, the commander shall assign an Installation Voting Assistance Officer (IVAO) to coordinate all voting activities on that installation. For continuity purposes, the commander should assign IVAO duties to a DoD civilian at the GS-12 level or above. Further, the commander of each separate unit shall assign a Unit Voting Assistance Officer (UVAO), at the O-2/E-7 level or above.
5. The Services will be responsible for documenting training of the IVAOs and UVAOs at the installation or base level and report completion on an annual basis through their internal chain of command.

6. Training for all Service members will be conducted annually. Basic training and command courses will emphasize and advertise voting assistance programs to encourage junior Service members to register and subsequently vote. Training and voting assistance will be provided for units preparing for deployment where voting materials and accessibility to register (Federal Post Card Application and Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot) may be limited when deployed at-sea or in a remote area.
7. The Services will designate at least one well-advertised fixed location on bases, installations and ships where absentee voting material and voting assistance is available to all military personnel, family members, and civilian employees. Locations may include legal offices, family service centers, community centers, etc.
8. Develop a system to ensure the in-hand delivery of Federal Post Card Applications to all eligible voters in compliance with the revised DoD Directive. The system may include numbers or percent contacted, but may not include names (or any other identifying information) of individual citizens.
9. The Services will develop comprehensive command-wide voting awareness, assistance programs and activities in conjunction with Armed Forces Voting Week.
10. The Inspectors General of the Services will include Service voting assistant programs as an item for specific review, evaluation and assessment, by June 30 of odd numbered years, reportable through the SSVR to the Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program.

c. Concur. The FVAP will continue to energetically work with the Secretaries of State, Directors of Elections, local election officials, national and international associations of election officials and overseas citizens, federal agencies, and others to improve and enhance the absentee voting process. The FVAP's annual pursuit of state legislative initiatives has enhanced the opportunity of our Nation's military to participate in the electoral process for federal, state and local offices. During the past four years, the states adopted 35 pieces of legislation, bringing uniformity and simplicity to the absentee voting process. The FVAP will continue to closely monitor state legislative activity to assist with legislation that would maximize access to the polls and oppose legislation that would add impediments to registration and voting.

The FVAP will continue to attend state and local election official conferences, meetings, and training sessions to provide information on the FVAP, provide and receive information on improvements to the absentee voting process at the local, state, and federal levels. This will include voter residence requirements, acknowledgement of receipt of absentee registration materials, and expedited handling of balloting materials.

Based on the success of the FVAP's Voting Over the Internet pilot project for the 2000 Election, the FVAP will continue to pursue new technology applications to improve the absentee registration and voting processes.