

State of Wisconsin\Government Accountability Board

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The Facts about Military and Overseas Voting In Wisconsin

The State of Wisconsin is nationally-recognized for its long history of ensuring military and overseas voters can participate in Wisconsin general elections. This is in spite of the challenge posed by Wisconsin being one of 10 states with a primary election after Labor Day. Wisconsin's military voters who are stationed in faraway places around the globe protecting our freedom need enough time to request, receive, vote and return their ballots. This is particularly true for military personnel serving in armed conflict, remote locations, in foxholes on active battlegrounds or on submarines. Overseas citizens living in faraway places also face a similar challenge. Congress recently enacted the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act, which imposes many mandates on the state, several of which Wisconsin has already been meeting since the late 1980s. However, the MOVE Act also requires the state to make its official ballot available at least 45 days before the November election. This presents a challenge for Wisconsin because our primary is relatively close to the November 2 General Election. Despite this late primary, the Wisconsin Legislature, the Government Accountability Board, and local election officials provide many ways for these citizens to participate in the selection of their elected officials quickly and securely:

- All military and overseas voters may have their official ballot sent to them electronically, by e-mail or fax, avoiding lengthy overseas mailing delays.
- The ballots of military voters will be counted up to 10 days after the November general election if postmarked by Election Day. September primary votes are counted if received no later than seven days after the election.
- Military electors do not have to register in order to vote in Wisconsin. They may simply request an absentee ballot for a single election or all elections using the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form, which is available at all military installations, U.S. embassies and consulates around the world and online.
- Overseas voters may register to vote and request an absentee ballot using the same (FPCA) form.
- All military and overseas voters who have requested to vote absentee are automatically sent a state write-in absentee ballot (SWAB) 90 days before the election by their municipal clerk. The ballot contains the names of the offices that will appear on the ballot along with instructions on how to write in the names of the candidates of their choice.
- All military and overseas voters who have requested to vote absentee may submit a special federal write-in absentee ballot (FWAB) that is available at all military installations, at U.S. embassies and consulates around the world and online.
- Local election officials track the status of all absentee ballots for military and overseas voters using the G.A.B.'s Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS).

- The Government Accountability Board has developed a special page on its website dedicated to providing information for military and overseas voters: <http://gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/voters/military-overseas>. Military and overseas voters can access a wealth of information to facilitate their participation in Wisconsin elections.
- The G.A.B. regularly updates local election officials on their responsibility to military and overseas voters, and especially emphasizes the new requirements of the MOVE Act. The G.A.B. also regularly monitors local compliance.

The Government Accountability Board is proud of the service Wisconsin election officials provide to our military and overseas voters. The municipal clerk is the primary point of contact for military and overseas voters to enable them to fully participate in Wisconsin elections. The municipal clerk keeps a current list of all military and overseas voters. In cooperation with the county clerks, municipal clerks also track the status of all absentee ballots for military and overseas voters using the G.A.B.'s Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS).

Wisconsin has been nationally recognized for its efforts to ensure that military and overseas voters can fully participate in Wisconsin elections. In the seminal work on military and overseas voting, the PEW Center on the States rated Wisconsin as "Time to Vote," their highest rating. This is the study that inspired passage of the MOVE Act. The study consisted of a thorough evaluation of the challenges faced by military and overseas citizens along with a comprehensive review of the laws and procedures of all 50 states. The PEW study also found that it took only 26 days for an overseas elector to complete our absentee process from start to finish, making Wisconsin one of the top 10 states in this category. This report is available online at:

http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Election_reform/NTTV_Report_Web.pdf.

In 2009 American University used the recommendations of the Carter/Baker Commission to create a democracy index as a basis for evaluating the states. The study ranked Wisconsin the highest among all states for its absentee procedures for military and overseas voters. The report, "*The State of Elections in the 50 States: Evaluating the Process Where It Counts*," is available online at:

<http://www1.american.edu/ia/cdem/pdfs/CDEM%20Final%20Rpt%20of%20the%20States%20-%20July%2015%2009.pdf>.