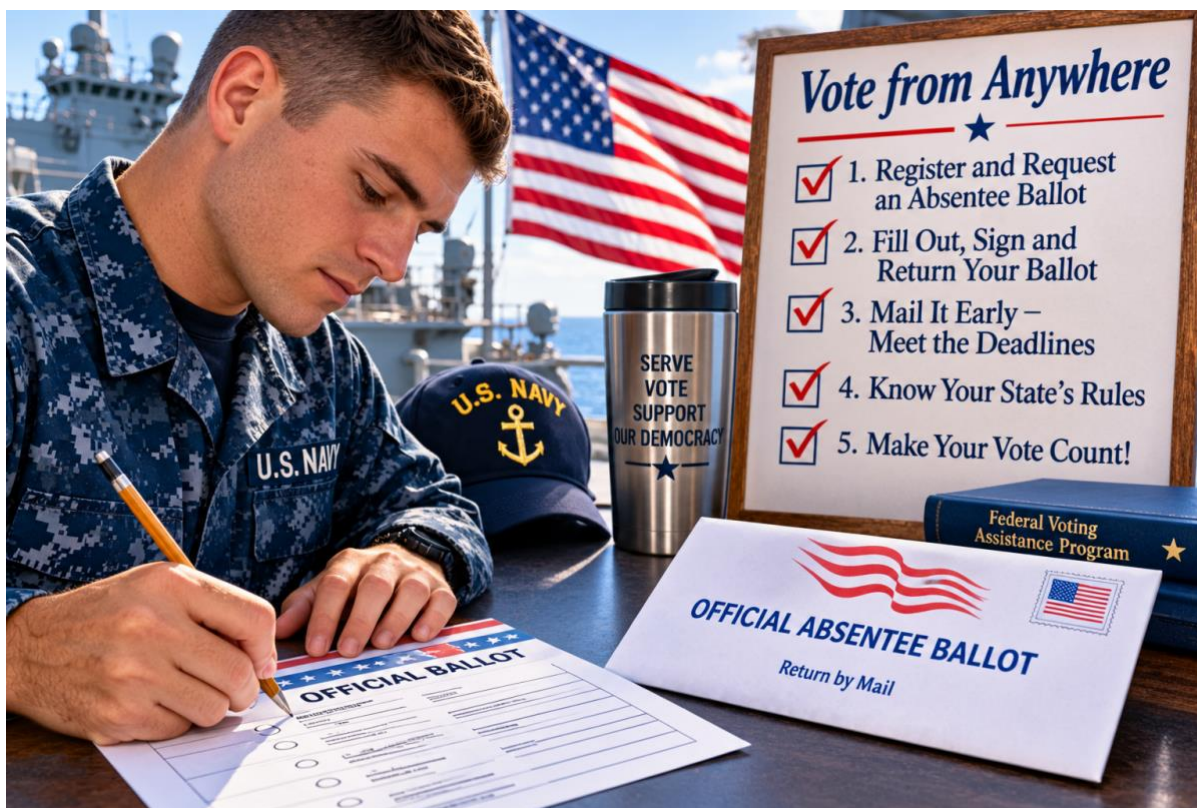




Voting While Deployed: Your Voice Still Counts

How Military Personnel Can Exercise Their Voting Rights from Anywhere in the World

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Serving Your Country Doesn't Mean Missing an Election

There are two ways to vote while deployed overseas. You can travel home, enter your local polling place, and pull the curtain behind you—or you can request an absentee ballot and vote from wherever military duty has taken you.

Since the first option might prove logistically impractical, not to mention its effect on your unit's operational readiness, let's concentrate on the second.

During my Navy career, every command had access to voting assistance, and I never encountered much difficulty casting an absentee ballot. The system worked because someone was responsible for explaining the procedures and helping sailors meet the deadlines.

Today, the process is even more convenient, although a few precautions remain important.

Your Voting Assistance Officer

Military installations and units have designated Voting Assistance Officers who help service members understand absentee voting procedures.

Your voting officer can explain how to register, request a ballot, identify your voting residence, and obtain information about your state's election requirements.

However, you don't have to wait for the voting officer to approach you. The Department of Defense operates the [Federal Voting Assistance Program \(FVAP\)](#), an excellent resource containing forms, instructions, election calendars, and state-specific voting information.

Register and Request Your Ballot

The first step is completing the **Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), Standard Form 76**. This form allows eligible military personnel and family members to register to vote and request an absentee ballot.

You can complete the application using the instructions at [FVAP.gov](#) and submit it to your local election office according to your state's requirements.

FVAP recommends submitting a new application every January and whenever your address changes. For a November general election, submitting it well before August is a sensible precaution.

Your voting residence is generally connected to your legal residence rather than wherever the military happens to station you. If you're uncertain which state or locality applies, consult your Voting Assistance Officer.

Complete and Return Your Ballot

When your absentee ballot arrives, read the instructions carefully.

States have different requirements for marking ballots, signing envelopes, providing identifying information, and returning completed ballots. Some permit electronic transmission, while others require ballots to be returned by mail.

Don't assume that a procedure accepted in one state will work in another.

Most importantly, **return your ballot promptly**. Overseas mail can be delayed, particularly aboard ships or at remote military installations.

For federal elections, states generally must transmit requested absentee ballots to eligible military and overseas voters at least 45 days before Election Day, provided the request was

received by the applicable deadline. That doesn't mean you should wait until the last minute to return yours.

What If Your Ballot Never Arrives?

Suppose you requested your ballot properly, but Election Day is approaching and nothing has appeared in the mail.

The Federal Voting Assistance Program provides a backup called the **Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB)**.

Eligible voters who have requested a ballot can use this alternative when there isn't sufficient time to receive and return the regular ballot. Instructions and eligibility requirements are available at [FVAP.gov](https://www.fvap.gov).

If your regular ballot subsequently arrives, FVAP advises completing and returning it as well. Election officials will count only one ballot.

You can also contact your local election office to check whether your completed ballot has been received.

Fifty States, Different Rules

Election procedures vary among states and territories. Registration deadlines, primary elections, party affiliation requirements, ballot-return methods, and receipt deadlines are not identical everywhere.

Rather than attempting to memorize these differences, visit [FVAP's Voting Assistance Guide](#), select your voting state, and follow the current instructions.

Your Voting Assistance Officer can help you understand those requirements.

And if you become particularly knowledgeable about absentee voting, be careful about advertising the fact. Your voting officer might decide you're a promising candidate to take over the job!

Why Bother to Vote?

If you need to ask that question, consider what military service represents.

One of the fundamental principles of our republic is civilian control of the Armed Forces. Every day of military life, service members follow orders and carry out policies established by the nation's elected civilian leadership.

Voting gives you a voice in selecting the people who establish those policies and exercise that authority.

The freedoms you have sworn to defend include the right of citizens to participate in free and open elections. That right doesn't disappear simply because military duty takes you halfway around the world.

You serve to protect that freedom. Don't neglect to exercise it.

Your vote counts, so don't waste it!