

Testimony of US Army Veteran Garrett Reppenhagen
Inactive Voter List Hearing 23 July 2012

One of the most important rights we have as Americans is the right to go to the polls and cast our ballots in favor of the people we want to represent us in our democracy. For over two hundred years, brave American men and women have raised their right hand and placed themselves in harm's way to defend this right and our freedom.

My name is Garrett Reppenhagen. My father is a Vietnam veteran, both my grandfathers served in World War II, and I am an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran. I represent many military veterans and service members as the Rocky Mountain West Coordinator for Vet Voice Foundation.

The Vet Voice Foundation wholeheartedly opposes your proposed rule prohibiting election officials from sending ballots to American troops serving overseas, in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. We feel that the idea that you would deliberately prevent our service members from exercising the very freedoms they fight for is offensive, un-American, and wrong.

Secretary of State Gessler, your order isn't just unpatriotic. It's also in direct violation of the federal Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act, which requires clerks to mail ballots to all eligible voters in the military. It is simply not feasible for troops who are deployed or stationed overseas to come to the polls, and they should not be excluded because they failed to vote in one General Election.

When I was serving as a US Army Cavalry trooper I was stationed in Germany with the 1st Infantry Division. Combined with an aggressive training schedule, that included months in remote centers, I completed a nine month peace keeping mission in Kosovo and a year combat deployment in Iraq. Throughout the entire time of my enlistment, my home of record remained my home state of Colorado. If it were not for absentee mail ballots I would not have been able to participate in the Democracy I swore an oath to defend.

During my military service my ability to consistently vote was disrupted by the distraction of my professional duty. If a service member fails to vote in an election because of their military service, and then no longer receives a ballot, they are effectively denied the opportunity to vote entirely. They cannot leave their post and return to Colorado to vote in person.

One of the most admirable qualities of our Armed Forces is that service members retain their rights as US citizens. That includes our right to vote. Please do not take that right away from us with your rules.

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