

# STATEMENT

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison

Hearing on Problems for Military and Overseas Voters: Why Many  
Soldiers and Their Families Can't Vote

Senate Committee on Rules and Administration

May 13, 2009

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Thank you, Senator Schumer for holding this very important hearing, and thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

We have been aware for some time that military personnel - whether serving overseas or at other duty stations distant from their home - face a series of impediments that make it all too difficult for them to apply for absentee ballots and return them to their states in time to meet the requirement to have their votes counted.

All too often we learn after an election that our military forces have been politically disenfranchised by restrictive laws that have the effect of barring them from the polls in their home states.

This issue is particularly important to me because nearly one in ten military personnel claims Texas as their home state. When you add in the military family members, over 400,000 active duty or family members of active duty personnel are eligible to vote in Texas. That

voting populations represents fully 16 percent of the total military voting population.

Unfortunately, according to a report by the Defense Manpower Data Center, only 22% of military personnel voted in 2006 as compared to 40% of the non-military.

Given that those who serve in our armed forces as a group are better educated than the general population of voters, it seems likely that there is something other than voter apathy that accounts for those low turn out numbers and that there may well be some structural barriers or other legal impediments that make it difficult for absentee military voters to cast their ballots.

If that is the case, and I believe it is, we owe it to our military personnel to find a way to remove barriers to the ballot box and make it easier for them to participate in the political process.

Those who have volunteered to serve their nation in often difficult circumstances must be assured not just of the right to vote but to know that when they do and send their ballot in, it will be counted.

We MUST fix this problem this year and not go into another election cycle with the same problems.

We are here today to learn more about the problems that military voters must contend with and to hear recommendations for legislation.

Last year, I cosponsored the Military Voting Protection Act with my fellow Texas Senator, Senator Cornyn. The purpose of the bill was to expedite the handling of absentee ballots by the Postal Service. This bill passed in the Senate but didn't make it out of the House.

Senator Cornyn reintroduced the bill yesterday, and once again I cosponsored his legislation. This bill will go a long way toward solving the problem military personnel often have of meeting state deadlines for submission and return of their ballots by expediting the process.

We welcome the testimony of our witnesses here today, and we pledge to work with you to implement solutions to this problem.

I thank the Chair, and I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses.

