

Statement of Senator Robert Bennett
Senate Rules and Administration Committee Hearing
May 13, 2009

Thank you for calling this hearing today, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your efforts to look into this important subject.

When we have hearings here on voting related subjects we often get partisan divisions over what the problems are and what the solutions should be. Today, however, we are going to hear about the problems our military service personnel encounter when trying to vote and I think we will all agree that their right to vote needs to be protected and facilitated.

Our soldiers are literally putting their lives on the line to defend and preserve our rights. We need to make sure they are able to exercise theirs.

The members of our military make tremendous sacrifices in the performance of their duties. They have to move frequently and often on short notice. They have to live and serve in remote and dangerous parts of the globe where mail delivery can be slow, unreliable and hazardous. They are completely reliant on the acts of others (election officials, mail carriers and Defense Department personnel) to get their ballots to them and back in time to be counted.

While some of the problems military voters encounter are shared with other absentee voters, their service poses additional logistical problems that are unique to them. We need to do what we can to help them overcome those hurdles.

I am pleased our panel today will be able to look at this issue from a range of perspectives – from the federal and state level and also from the perspective of a local election official. Legislators make laws but these local election officials are responsible for implementing them, and without competent and dedicated people at that level nothing we do here will have any positive effect. Federal, state and local officials all need to work together to make sure these service members are able to exercise their right to vote.

I am pleased that we also have witnesses here today who served in the military and can talk about this issue from the perspective of a soldier and voter who has dealt with the problems that exist.

I thank the Chairman again for calling this hearing, and I look forward to the witness's testimony.