

Senator Ben Nelson
Opening Statement
Problems for Military and Overseas Voters: Why Many Soldiers and
Their Families Can't Vote
May 13, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today on the very important topic of the challenges facing military and overseas voters. In addition to the privilege of serving with you on the Rules Committee, I am the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel, so the needs of our military servicemembers are of particular concern to me.

I look forward to today's testimony from our witnesses to help shed light on the problems that our military personnel – especially those deployed overseas – encounter in trying to exercise their fundamental right to vote. I have seen disturbing statistics that indicate to me that our efforts to protect the franchise of military and overseas voters are falling short, including the alarming information from the 2006 Election Assistance Commission Military and Overseas Voting Report that only about **one third** of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Voting Act (UOCAVA) ballots requested were actually “cast or counted.”

One disenfranchised service member is one too many, but when two out of three ballots are not counted – for whatever reason – we have a serious problem on our hands. I look forward to the 2008 report to hopefully see some progress in this area. At the same time, I recognize that much of the data on overseas voting needs to be improved and made more complete and consistent from county-to-county and state-to-state. I hope we can address that problem going forward, because this is an important issue which demands reliable information.

As we seek to identify the problems with military and overseas voting, it is important to keep perspective on the roles of the federal, state, and local governments in election administration. Clearly, this is an area where all levels of government must work together to improve the system, and I hope today's hearing can help clarify the roles of the Department of Defense, state and local election administrators, and help identify any opportunity for improved federal policy.

I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, to take the information presented here today and use it to improve the process for military and overseas voters. I hope we can identify opportunities to increase coordination between state, local, and federal officials and find better ways to utilize technology to help military and overseas voters. Today's hearing is an important first step: identifying the problems. I hope we can build on today's hearing to put in place some policies that will improve military and overseas voting in upcoming elections.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.