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## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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The Honorable Leon Panetta  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301-3010

Dear Secretary Panetta,

I write to express my concerns regarding low absentee voter participation rates by U.S. military service members.

As you know, Congress passed the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act of 2009 [P.L. 111-84] to help alleviate the confusing array of barriers to absentee voter participation by active duty military personnel. However, trends indicate that military voter participation has decreased since passage of the statute. In September 2011, an internal review by the Federal Voter Assistance Program found that 29 percent of registered military voters never received an absentee ballot for the 2010 elections. Furthermore, an August 2012 report by the Military Voter Protection Project found that military absentee voter registration rates are running below 2008 levels.

In light of these facts, I am deeply troubled by the Department of Defense (DOD) Inspector General's finding last week that approximately half of U.S. military bases lack congressionally mandated installation voting assistance offices (IVAOs), designed to assist service members through the voting process. To assess effectiveness of DOD efforts to establish IVAOs, the Inspector General attempted to contact the 229 IVAOs listed as operational by DOD. According to the Inspector General, "The results were clear. Our attempts to contact IVAOs failed about 50 percent of the time." After three years and over \$92 million, these results are unacceptable.

With less than 60 days prior to the election it is imperative that the Department of Defense safeguard the voting rights of those who have chosen to serve our country. It would be a harsh irony indeed if those who fight to defend democracy found themselves unable to participate in it. As such, I request that DOD report to Congress as soon as possible on its efforts to provide military voters with the opportunity and resources required to register to vote and to request and receive an absentee ballot.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

  
Roger F. Wicker