

Military absentee ballot requests below expectations

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A national organization is reporting an alarmingly low number of absentee ballots being requested by members of the military in battleground states around the country – including a 55 percent decline in Nevada – ahead of the Nov. 6 general election.

“The number of absentee ballots being requested is shockingly low,” said Eric Eversole, founder and executive director of the Military Voter Protection Project. “While we knew the number of absentee ballots requests would increase as we got closer to the election – and they have – the number being requested is still way too low and indicates that many military members will have their voices silenced on Election Day.”

The group reports a 46 percent decline in absentee ballot requests in Florida this year compared to the 2008 presidential election, a 59 percent decline in North Carolina, and 70 percent declines in Virginia and Ohio.

The Nevada Secretary of State’s Office reports the number of ballots requested by military personnel within the U.S. and overseas totals 2,210 so far in this election year, a 55 percent reduction over the 4,919 requested in 2008. The number is up from the 1,533 absentee ballots requested in the 2010 mid-term election in Nevada.

The 2,210 requests is also an increase from the 1,750 absentee ballots cited as being requested in Nevada in a report issued by the MVPP on Aug. 27.

UOCAVA numbers in Nevada for 2008, 2010, and 2012 through the

MOVE Act deadline:

	2008	2010	2012
Military (Domestic/Overseas)	4,919	1,533	2,210
Overseas Citizens	2,562	578	1,510
Other	2	0	
Total	7,483	2,140	3,720

The 2012 requests reported by the Secretary of State's Office are through the 45-day window when ballots had to be mailed. More requests can and should be received by counties.

Nevada Secretary of State Ross Miller said he has been told that it takes a maximum of seven days for an absentee ballot to be delivered to the most remote forward operating base in Afghanistan. And in the case of Nevada, military personnel can vote via email, he said.

"It is the highest priority of the Department of Defense and their military system to get those ballots to the troops," Miller said. "They process those ballots very quickly.

"I'm confident that we're going to see a relatively high number of requests coming from our military," he said. "The outreach seems to be working. We still have a lot of time for them to request their ballots. And I think that's the critical point here; is that although the numbers are a little bit low right now, there's still several weeks for the military to request their ballots and I'm confident that they are going to do so."

One reason for the drop in the number of requests is that the troops serving in Iraq have returned home, and the number of troops serving in Afghanistan have been on the decline, Miller said.

"I'm confident at the end of the day that we're going to see a

high turnout of our military men and women overseas casting ballots,” he said. “The fact remains we simply have fewer military overseas because in 2008 we were fighting active wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and we don’t have that high of numbers of personnel overseas right now.”

Miller’s office reported on Sept. 24 that all Nevada military ballots and ballots to Nevadans covered by the federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act were in the mail 45 days in advance of the election as required by the law.

All 17 county clerks and registrars of voters confirmed that all valid requests were transmitted pursuant to applicable state and federal laws. Reports based on rumors that the ballots would not be delivered on time were inaccurate, according to the Nevada Secretary of State’s office.

“The timely mailing of these ballots is critical,” Miller said in announcing last month that the counties met the deadline. “Just more than a week ago I was honored to visit our troops in the Middle East, including the officers and enlisted personnel who manage and oversee the elections process among the troops. We assured them that they’d have the ballots on time so that their votes would count. As the people who are on the front lines of protecting democracy, we owe them that.”

In July, Nevada was named one of 15 “all-star states” by the MVPP. The MVPP cited Miller’s proactive approach to military and absentee voting issues including his leadership in Nevada’s passage of the Uniform Military and Overseas Voting Act, and the use of internet technology to allow members of the military to determine whether their ballot has been received and counted.”

Nevada had an issue complying with the MOVE Act in 2010 in Elko County due to the failure of a private vendor to deliver printed ballots on time. But the U.S. Department of Justice

praised Nevada elections officials for working “quickly and cooperatively” to address the delay.

In an Oct. 1 news release, Eversole said the Pentagon and its Federal Voting Assistance Program failed to comply with a key provision of the MOVE Act to provide greater voter assistance on military installations. In particular, FVAP failed to create voter registration offices that would provide voting assistance to every military member when they checked into a new duty station.

“Notwithstanding the data, we have not given up and will keep fighting for our military voters,” Eversole said. “The registration deadlines are quickly approaching, but there is still time to fix this mess. We are asking every active duty military member or spouse to visit [hereosvote.org](https://www.hereosvote.org) where they can quickly register and request an absentee ballot. They can quickly fill out the form and get their absentee ballots in 7 to 10 days.”