



OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-4000

AUG 27, 2010

PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

The Honorable A. Ralph Mollis
Secretary of State
State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
State House, Room 217
Providence, RI 02903-1120

Dear Mr. Mollis:

The Department of Defense received from the State of Rhode Island a timely application dated August 3, 2010, copy attached, for an undue hardship waiver under Section 102(g) of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), as amended by the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act (MOVE Act) for the November 2, 2010 Federal general election.

Under delegated authority from the Secretary of Defense as the Presidential Designee for UOCAVA, I have reviewed the State's application, consulted with the representative of the Attorney General of the United States, and find it meets the requirements for a one time undue hardship waiver under Section 102(g)(2) of UOCAVA. Accordingly, I approve the State of Rhode Island's request to waive the application of Section 102(a)(8)(A) of UOCAVA for the November 2, 2010 Federal general election.

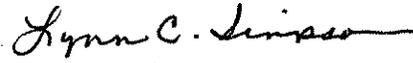
In rendering this decision, I carefully considered the assertions made by the State in support of its waiver request which are addressed in detail in the Memorandum attached to this letter. Based on those assertions and the attached rationale, I have determined the following: 1) the October 28, 2009 passage of the MOVE Act and Rhode Island's primary election scheduled for September 14, 2010 created an undue hardship that prohibits the State from complying with Section 102(a)(8)(A) of UOCAVA; and 2) the State's proposed comprehensive plan for this election provides sufficient time for UOCAVA voters to vote and have their ballots counted.

This waiver is based on Rhode Island transmitting "special state absentee ballots" (with an uncertified list of federal candidates) for the November 2, 2010 Federal general election no later than September 17, 2010, posting voters' regular State absentee ballots on Rhode Island's Voter Information Center website no later than September 24, 2010, and transmitting regular State absentee ballots by facsimile and postal mail no later than



October 3, 2010, and that absentee ballots will be accepted up to the close of the polls
November 2, 2010 and counted.

Sincerely,



Lynn C. Simpson
Director, Human Capital and Resource
Management
Performing the Duties of the Principal
Deputy Under Secretary of Defense
(Personnel and Readiness)

Enclosures:
As stated

MEMORANDUM

Approval of the State of Rhode Island's MOVE Act Waiver Request under Section 102(g)(2) of UOCAVA for the November 2, 2010 Federal General Election

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) of the Department of Defense received the application of the State of Rhode Island (the State), dated August 3, 2010, for an undue hardship waiver for the November 2, 2010 general election for Federal office, as provided by the amendments to Section 102(g) of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA),¹ enacted by the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act (MOVE Act).² As described in this memorandum, the approval of the waiver request followed careful consideration of the assertions made by the State in support of its waiver request, including the official waiver request letter and subsequent supplementary information provided, and the explanations of its written request in the conference call on August 4, 2010 including: Janet Ruggiero, Director of Elections; Mark Welch, Legal Counsel; John Fleming, Deputy Secretary of State and Chief of Staff, Office of the Secretary of State of Rhode Island; and officials from FVAP and the United States Department of Justice's Voting Section (DOJ/Voting), and an additional call on August 24, 2010 including: Janet Ruggiero, Director of Elections; and officials from FVAP and DOJ/Voting.

The Presidential Designee for UOCAVA³ has reviewed Rhode Island's application, consulted with the representative of the Attorney General of the United States, and finds the State's application meets the requirements for a one-time undue hardship waiver under Section 102(g)(2) of UOCAVA,⁴ and approves Rhode Island's waiver request from the application of Section 102(a)(8)(A) of UOCAVA for the November 2, 2010 Federal general election. For purposes of this Memorandum, the term "Presidential Designee" includes those officials exercising authority delegated by the Presidential Designee.

I. Background and Initial Findings

UOCAVA authorizes the Presidential Designee to grant a waiver only to those States whose reason for a waiver corresponds with one of the following situations:

1. The State's primary election date prohibits the State from complying with Section 102(a)(8)(A);
2. The State has suffered a delay in generating ballots due to a legal contest; or

¹ 42 U.S.C. § 1973ff, *et seq.*

² Pub. L. No. 111-84, Subtitle H, §§ 575-589, 123 Stat. 2190, 2318-2335 (2009).

³ The Secretary of Defense was designated the Presidential Designee by Executive Order 12642 (June 8, 1988), 53 CFR § 21975. The Secretary of Defense has delegated this authority to the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel & Readiness) through DOD Directive 1004.04.

⁴ 42 U.S.C. § 1973ff-1(g)(2)

3. The State Constitution prohibits the State from complying with such Section.⁵

It is within the Presidential Designee's authority to consider Rhode Island's waiver application because Rhode Island states that its primary election scheduled for September 14, 2010 prohibits the State from complying with Section 102(a)(8)(A) of UOCAVA.⁶

Under UOCAVA, if a State determines that it is unable to comply with the requirement to transmit absentee ballots at least 45 days before a federal election (45 day prior requirement) due to one of the three situations referenced above resulting in an undue hardship, the Chief State Election Official shall request a waiver from the Presidential Designee pursuant to the Act. The Presidential Designee shall approve such a request if the Presidential Designee determines that:

1. One or more of the three referenced situations creates an undue hardship for the State; and,
2. The State's comprehensive plan presented in support of its request provides absent uniformed services and overseas voters (UOCAVA voters) sufficient time to receive and submit absentee ballots they have requested in time to be counted in the election for Federal office.

The Presidential Designee's findings for each of these requirements are addressed separately below.

The comprehensive plan proposed by Rhode Island addressed the following requirements set forth in the MOVE Act:

- (i) the steps the State will undertake to ensure that UOCAVA voters have time to receive, mark, and submit their ballots in time to have those ballots counted in the election;
- (ii) why the plan provides UOCAVA voters sufficient time to vote as a substitute for the requirements of the MOVE Act; and
- (iii) the underlying factual information which explains how the plan provides such sufficient time to vote as a substitute for such requirements.⁷

Further, as required by UOCAVA,⁸ Rhode Island's application includes recognition that the purpose of the Act's 45 day prior requirement is to allow UOCAVA voters enough time to vote and have their votes counted in an election for Federal office.

In determining whether the State's comprehensive plan provides sufficient time to vote as a substitute for the requirement to transmit ballots 45 days before the election, the Presidential Designee considered that the minimum absentee ballot requirements under the new law require ballots to be transmitted 45 days prior to Election Day, using the voter's choice of either postal mail or electronic transmission method. Although facsimile transmission is compliant with the

⁵ 42 U.S.C. § 1973ff-1(g)(2)(B) .

⁶ See 42 U.S.C. § 1973ff-1(g)(2)(B)(i) and 42 U.S.C. § 1973ff-1(a)(8)(A).

⁷ 42 U.S.C. § 1973ff-1(g)(1)(D).

⁸ 42 U.S.C. § 1973ff-1(g)(1)(A).

MOVE Act's electronic transmission requirements, it is the least desirable method of electronic transmission, given that it is the least available among overseas active duty military voters, Reserve component military voters, and overseas DOD civilian employees.⁹

Each State's comprehensive plan was evaluated against several criteria, and the analysis as to whether a State's comprehensive plan provides sufficient time was examined by considering the totality of circumstances presented in the plan. Among the issues considered was the total time a voter has to receive, mark and return the ballot and have it counted (including the number of days before and after Election Day). Also among the issues considered was the cumulative number and accessibility of alternative methods of ballot transmission, and, if applicable, ballot return, as additional alternative methods provide more UOCAVA voters with the likelihood they will have sufficient time to receive, vote, and return their ballots and have them counted. Finally, each State's comprehensive plan was reviewed for any additional efforts made by the State, whether put in place in advance of or subsequent to any changes in the law, that improved the likelihood a UOCAVA voter would be able to receive, vote and return the ballot and have it count.

II. The State Has Shown Undue Hardship

Rhode Island's application, as required by the statute, explained why its chief State election official determined that its primary election date and associated activities required to generate a general election ballot prohibit it from transmitting to UOCAVA voters an absentee ballot by the 45th day prior to the November 2, 2010 election, and how that created an undue hardship. Accordingly, the Presidential Designee finds that given the timing of the passage of the MOVE Act on October 28, 2009 and the issues and challenges cited by the State in its waiver application, Rhode Island's scheduled primary creates an undue hardship as contemplated by the MOVE Act.

III. The State's Comprehensive Plan Provides Sufficient Time for UOCAVA Voters To Vote and Have That Vote Counted

The Presidential Designee concludes that Rhode Island did establish that its proposed comprehensive plan provides UOCAVA voters "sufficient time to receive absentee ballots they have requested and submit marked absentee ballots to the appropriate State election official in time to have that ballot counted" in the November 2, 2010 Federal general election.¹⁰ In reaching this determination, the Presidential Designee examined the totality of circumstances presented in the plan to determine whether it provided sufficient time to vote as a substitute for UOCAVA's requirement that ballots be transmitted at least 45 days prior to Election Day. Among the issues considered were the time voters have to receive, mark and return their ballots and have them counted (both before and after Election Day); the cumulative number of alternative methods of ballot transmission and return; and the accessibility of the alternative ballot transmission methods presented in the comprehensive plan

⁹ Defense Manpower Data Center, "2006 Survey Results on Voting Assistance Among Military Members and DoD Civilian Employees by Location, Age, and Paygrade," Survey Note No. 2007-011, at 3, July 9, 2007, at <http://www.fvap.gov/resources/media/ivas06dod.pdf>.

¹⁰ 42 U.S.C. § 1973ff-1(g)(2)(A).

Under its submitted comprehensive plan, Rhode Island will transmit to UOCAVA voters an “official state blank ballot,” along with federal candidate lists, by September 17, 2010, which is 46 days before the Federal general election, post regular absentee ballots online by September 24, 2010, which is 39 days before the Federal general election, and transmit absentee ballots by postal mail or facsimile no later than October 3, 2010, which is 30 days before the election. The State will allow absentee ballots to be received and counted by local election jurisdictions until Election Day. This will provide the UOCAVA voter returning an “official state blank ballot” 46 days of total ballot transit time, the voter returning a ballot retrieved online 39 days of total ballot transit time, and the voter returning an absentee ballot received by postal mail or facsimile 30 days of total ballot transit time.

The Presidential Designee considered the ballot transit time provided in conjunction with the additional methods other than postal mail available to Rhode Island’s UOCAVA voters to receive and return their ballots. The comprehensive plan proposed by Rhode Island provides two alternative transmission methods for all UOCAVA voters and will make ballots available by either of the alternative methods, in addition to postal mail, the voter requests: facsimile or online delivery. All voters in Rhode Island may choose to use electronic delivery through the Rhode Island Secretary of State’s Voter Information Center (VIC). UOCAVA voters may choose through VIC to receive their ballot online and print it out to return either by mail or by facsimile. Voters may access the VIC using sufficient personal data to ensure voter security, but it does not require a “pin number,” so that access is available the first time the voter chooses to access the VIC. This is a significant technological advance in ballot availability, as it makes an electronic ballot available to a UOCAVA voter the same day the official ballot is ready electronically. Additionally, Rhode Island allows UOCAVA voters to return their ballot by facsimile.

Additionally, Rhode Island’s comprehensive plan states that the “official state blank ballot” will be accompanied by list of Federal general election candidates that do not appear close enough for a recount, which the State expects to encompass all federal contests on the ballot. As soon as the official ballot PDF is available, the State will upload it to the VIC and make it accessible to UOCAVA voters. Rhode Island, in its waiver application, committed to making the PDF available to UOCAVA voters by the 39th day prior to this year’s election. Second, an official full state ballot is also mailed, or sent by facsimile if so requested by the voter, as soon as it is available but no later than October 3, the 30th day prior to this year’s election. Rhode Island will count the official full state ballot if it is received back in time to be counted. If it is not, then Rhode Island will count the “official state blank ballot”, or the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB), whichever is properly last received in time to be counted.

Therefore, given the totality of circumstances presented in the comprehensive plan and the other election administration rules already in place, the Presidential Designee finds Rhode Island’s comprehensive plan provides UOCAVA voters with sufficient time to receive, mark and return their ballot in time to be counted.

IV. Conclusion and Final Requirements

Given the foregoing and considering the totality of the circumstances presented, the waiver request of the State of Rhode Island is granted. The Presidential Designee determines the State's primary election date prohibits the State from complying with Section 102(a) (8) (A) of UOCAVA. The Presidential Designee has further determined that the comprehensive plan presented by Rhode Island provides UOCAVA voters sufficient time to receive absentee ballots they have requested and to submit marked ballots to the appropriate election official in time to be counted in the November 2, 2010 election, is therefore a sufficient substitute for Section 102(a)(8)(A)'s requirement to transmit ballots 45 days in advance of Election Day, and thus the State's plan serves as a basis for granting a hardship waiver under section 102(g)(2).

Consequently, as noted above, this waiver is based on the understanding that the State of Rhode Island will comply with all understandings described herein, including that they will transmit for the November 2, 2010 Federal election to UOCAVA voters, the "official state blank ballot" with a list of federal general election candidates, by September 17, 2010, that they will post regular absentee ballots online by September 24, 2010, that they will transmit regular absentee ballots by postal mail by October 3, 2010, and that absentee ballots will be accepted up to close of polls on November 2, 2010 and counted.

A. Post-Election Evaluation

Because a waiver plan must provide UOCAVA voters sufficient time to vote, an important component of the approved comprehensive plan is a post-election evaluation of the comprehensive plan, provided to FVAP, which must include the following:

- Written certification that ballots were transmitted to UOCAVA voters on the date and in the manner described in the waiver application;
- The numbers of ballots sent to absent uniformed services voters with APO and FPO addresses, the number of ballots sent to uniformed services voters at a street address within the United States and the number of ballots sent to overseas civilian voters;
- The number of ballots from each of these groups returned in time to be counted;
- The number of ballots from each of these groups returned too late to be counted;
- If possible, a breakdown of further details about each of the above categories between ballots faxed, downloaded from the online ballot delivery system, and sent by postal mail;
- Any feedback, whether positive or negative, received from voters about any elements of the State's comprehensive plan; and
- Any additional information relevant to the effectiveness of the comprehensive plan, including information showing quantitatively the results of the comprehensive plan, and how the plan provided UOCAVA voters sufficient opportunity to receive, vote, and return their ballots.

B. Reporting

As part of its comprehensive plan, Rhode Island officials agreed to keep FVAP and DOJ/Voting apprised of any subsequent problems in implementing the comprehensive plan as proposed, including but not limited to any failures of local election officials to transmit absentee ballots in accordance with the timeframe specified by the State's comprehensive plan.

Any questions or concerns, please contact Paddy McGuire, FVAP Deputy Director for Election Official Assistance, at 703-588-1584, or Paddy.McGuire@fvap.gov.