UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS

SUBJECT: Guidance in Implementing Voting Assistance Programs

DoD Directive 1000.4, Federal Voting Assistance Program, and DoD's Voting Action Plan provide guidance to the Military Departments in implementing voting assistance programs within their Services. The guidance and direction contained within these documents should be used as a baseline and may be adjusted to meet specific requirements and cultures within each Service. In several areas the Directive and the Action Plan use the word "should" to allow flexibility for the Services in implementing their voting assistance guidance.

The revised DoD Directive 1000.4 and 2008-2009 Voting Action Plan are currently in coordination prior to signature. The following are key areas in these revisions and clarifications to existing sections:

- The Directive provides guidance regarding desired rank of Voting Assistance Officers (VAO) within a unit. This guidance is not absolute and may be modified at the Service and/or unit level to meet local conditions within the Service or unit. It is preferable to assign an enthusiastic volunteer as a VAO who is outside the rank guidance of the Directive rather than assigning a less enthusiastic member who meets the criterion. The goal is to assign quality individuals with enough authority as VAOs to get the job done.

- The Directive provides guidance regarding the ratio of VAOs to assigned members within a unit. Again, this guidance is not absolute and may be modified at the Service and/or unit level to meet local conditions. A larger unit whose members are concentrated in one locale may require fewer VAOs than a smaller unit whose members are geographically dispersed. VAOs are encouraged to have assistants where necessary. The goal is to ensure coverage regardless of location.

- The directive recommends civilians at the Installation Voting Assistance Officer level for continuity; whenever possible, assign them to be in place during the 18 month period from October 2007 through March 2009.

- The Directive requires in hand delivery of the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) voter registration and absentee ballot request form to each member by January 15th of each calendar year. The revision of the Directive permits electronic distribution of the FPCA as long as electronic distribution is done locally and receipt of the FPCA can be verified. The goal is that all unit members be contacted either through verifiable electronic means or in-person to ensure they have received the forms. Due to the early 2008 primary elections, distributions beginning in September 2007 are encouraged.

VAO workshops will commence in September 2007 and continue into 2008. They are the most effective method to train VAOs in their duties and responsibilities. Units should make special efforts to assure attendance by VAOs who are within a reasonable distance of a scheduled workshop. Furthermore, workshops are not service-specific and should be attended by VAOs from all Services within the region regardless of the host installation.

As leaders of the Armed Services, it is our responsibility to do everything we can to ensure that our Service members and families have every opportunity to exercise their right to vote in the 2008 primary and general elections.

David S. C. Chu