

New U.S. Law Makes Voting Easier for Americans Abroad

This coming November, U.S. voters will elect 39 U.S. Senator and the entire House of Representatives. For overseas voters, the process will be much easier, thanks in large part to a new law - the Military and Overseas Voters Empowerment (MOVE) Act - that the U.S. Congress enacted late last year.

To vote absentee, U.S. citizens living outside the United States must be registered to vote, and must request an absentee ballot. You can accomplish both tasks by completing a Federally-issued combination voter registration application and absentee ballot request form known as the Federal Post Card Application, or FPCA. This form, along with key State-by-State instructions, is available on the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at www.fvap.gov, or from the voting officer at the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi.

The new law gives U.S. citizens overseas the ability to request and receive absentee ballots electronically. All voters who want to take advantage of this new option should send in a new FPCA with your email and/or complete fax number clearly written out. U.S. citizens who have changed their names, addresses, or email addresses, or who are infrequent voters, should also submit a new FPCA.

Seventeen year-olds who will be 18 on Election Day (November 2, 2010) can also register now. Some States allow U.S. citizens who have never resided in the United States to vote in their parents' State of voting residence. Check the www.FVAP.gov website for your State's procedures.

Be sure to follow your State's instructions carefully when completing the form and sending it to local election officials in the United States. The FVAP website and the Overseas Vote Foundation website, www.overseasvotefoundation.org, have wizards that help you complete and address your FPCA. If you are unsure where you lived in the United States, or where to send your application, the Embassy voting officer can help you. Write to VoteHanoi@state.gov for assistance.

The new law requires States to send out ballots a minimum of 45 days in advance of Election Day. If you fail to receive your absentee ballot within a reasonable time period, notify your local election officials by phone or email, and ask for a new ballot electronically.

Every voter should be aware that you can use the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB) as a back-up emergency ballot. Like the FPCA, the FWAB and instructions for its use are available on the www.FVAP.gov website or from the U.S. Consulate.

Vote your ballot and return it promptly to ensure it reaches your local election officials before your State's ballot receipt deadline. If you use the FWAB, and later receive your official ballot, vote and return it immediately. Under the new law, States must put in place a mechanism that allows voters to confirm that the voted ballot has been received by the State. Again, check www.fvap.gov for a link to your State's election information.

Take this opportunity to register with the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi. It's easy to do – just go on line to <http://travel.state.gov>. Registered U.S. citizens receive important reminders from the Embassy on safety and security, voting, and other matters of importance to the U.S. citizen community in Hanoi.