

PRESENTATION TO THE U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
Millenium Center, University of Missouri-St. Louis
September 21, 2006

I am Patricia Hollarn, better known as Pat, the Supervisor of Elections in Okaloosa County, Florida, and very honored to be asked to address this distinguished audience. Election supervisors in Florida are elected county constitutional officers, full-time election administrators who are independent of, but work closely with, the Florida Department of State, Division of Elections. The Division is responsible for promulgating rules, published in the Florida Administrative Code, when directed by the legislature to add detail to the statutes. I have been in office eighteen years and have a close working relationship with state and federal officials. I am a CERA graduate of The Election Center, a member of IACREOT, and a past president of the Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections.

Okaloosa County is home to several major military installations. Eglin AFB's "landlord" of the largest U. S. military reservation is the commander of the Air Armament Center, with many tenant units from Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marines. Hurlburt Field, home of Special Operations, used to be a minor auxiliary field of Eglin, but is now home to a major command and many thousands of troops. There are a number of other installations as well, but enough to say that these bases not only have over 30,000 active duty members plus their families, but that they are in a constant state of movement, especially being deployed to critical areas of the world. As Florida has no state income tax and it is the retirement location of choice for so many, these military members and their dependents constitute a majority of our registered voters.

My husband is a retired Air Force officer, a fighter pilot, and therefore I have first-hand experience in his 23+ years on active duty of being a UOCAVA voter. Almost to a person, my staff of 18 consists of active duty spouses, retired military members or dependents of same. Of my 750 poll workers, more than half are retired military members or dependents. So it is no coincidence that we place the highest priority on serving our military voters here and around the world, and our overseas civilians. As an independent elected official, I use my discretion as well as knowledge of the law, to serve these voters best by following the direction of the Florida Supreme Court in 2000, when in their Bush v. Gore ruling, they said that election officials should not place hypertechnical reliance on the statutes in order to disenfranchise an otherwise eligible voter. My interpretation of the law, with advice of counsel, has been upheld.

For all these reasons and more, we employ whatever legal means we have to facilitate voter registration, delivery of voter service, and especially providing ballots to UOCAVA voters. Following are some of our procedures:

- The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), pursuant to UOCAVA, is for use when a military member or dependent is **absent** from his/her county of residence. When a military member or dependent who physically resides within the county sends in an FPCA as a new registration, we do process their registration as valid

but then send them a Florida Voter Registration Application (FVRA) already filled out with the information they have provided, and ask them to complete it, sign it, and return it to us in the post-paid self-addressed envelope we include with it. This is to make sure we gather the information required of Florida residents while they are physically residing in the county of their legal residence. Response is excellent.

- Because the Florida form also has a question about military status (at my suggestion) we can capture that information even when military voters residing in the county use the FVRA. Anyone giving a base housing residence address is contacted to verify status if they neglect to check the military status box.
- Absentee requests are not automatically entered for these new military registrants, but as Florida has no-fault absentee requests, any request they may make is honored. In addition, if we become aware of deployments, we offer many extra services to provide eligible voters in any units with ballots before they leave, or wherever they are going. We maintain year-round contact with Voting Assistance Officers (VOA's) and many of the commanders to let them know of our special services. This includes my 24-hour availability to provide ballots, or allowing military personnel to carry the ballots on military aircraft to the troops.
- Whenever we receive an address change from a voter with a new address out of the county, within the U.S. or an APO, FPO, or foreign address, we contact that voter to verify if status is military, if we do not already have that information (from the years it was not collected). Overseas civilians of course have automatic UOCAVA status.
- We have a separate section of our web site www.govote-okaloosa.com for the military voter, covering registration, absentee voting, federal and state write-in ballots, and a link to the FVAP web site. Our Voter Guide, published annually, is available all over the county and a printable version is available on the web site. We submit press releases to area base newspapers, speak to many organizations on base, and contact individual units with deployed troops to provide absentee ballots. We keep an data base of out-of-county military voters and blanket email them with the candidate list, after qualifying is over and prior to ballots being available.
- We send a Notice of Elections with Absentee Request Form (NOE's) to **all out-of-county voters**, military and civilian all over the world, annually. The NOE is a two-part 8 ½ x11 post card stock notice, perforated for the voter to keep one half for the information on elections and the other half to return (postage paid) with the request, address or name change, possibly a cancellation, or whatever else we need to know. We also have check boxes for status (military in US or overseas, military dependent in US or overseas, etc) to have yet another way to capture or verify that information. Prior to the presidential election year, when our presidential preference primary is in March, we send those out in November prior

to the Christmas mail rush, and also so there is sufficient time to re-mail for forwardable addresses, etc. For the gubernatorial election year, with an early September primary, we mail the NOE's in April to again collect new addresses in time. In the odd-numbered years, we have municipal elections in March and send NOE's to those who are eligible in those elections. This Notice of Elections will be discussed further under the HAVA requirement for honoring absentee requests for two general election cycles.

- In the early 1990's, Florida adopted emergency rules to allow ballots to be faxed out and back for Desert Storm, Grenada, and also Hurricane Andrew (local guard and reserve sent to help in south Florida). This proved both safe and successful that it was eventually adopted routinely for all elections strictly for overseas voters only. With the explosion of email, the definition of "electronic means" was expanded to include sending ballots by email, however they can only be returned by fax or snail mail at this time.
- We successfully participated in FVAP's original internet voting project, Vote On the Internet (VOI) and also its follow up project, Secure Electronic Registration & Voting Experiment (SERVE) until its cancellation. For the past eight years, we have had successful internet voting on general election days for about 30,000 students in our *Kids Vote Too/Teens Vote Too* school program. We are now involved in a private sector project for internet voting for overseas voters that we hope to launch in 2008.
- For every absentee request we receive by letter, postcard, phone, email, etc that includes an email address from a UOCAVA voter overseas, we advise them that if they have a problem receiving or sending mail, we can email or fax them ballots. Since the Southwest Asian conflicts after 9/11, we have extensive email ballot transmission, most of them being returned by fax.
- We attempt to maintain a database of as many email addresses for UOCAVA voters as we possibly can, but the mobility of these voters makes that somewhat difficult to keep current. However, we do send a roster of candidates as soon as qualifying is over and before the ballots are ready to those voters, inside and outside the US. State law just requires it for overseas but we send to all those we have who are not within our county.
- Even though we maintain and honor absentee requests from UOCAVA voters for two complete general election cycles, we continue to send our Notices of Elections to all out-of-county registered voters, in hopes of collecting as many new addresses as possible. This also results in military voters advising when they have separated or retired and registered to vote elsewhere, thus keeping our rolls more up to date. As 2006 is the first year we have honored requests for a second general election cycle based on 2004 requests, we do have some interesting figures to report based on our September 5 Primary.

- Having mailed nearly 10,000 NOE's in April 2006, we did receive responses or later contact from about 1800 UOCAVA voters. This left us with **5,664** UOCAVA voters from whom we have had no response or contact since 2004 who were automatically sent ballots in the August 1 mailing. Of those **5,664** ballots, **1,290** came back Returned Undeliverable, with no good forwarding address. Unfortunately, under Florida law, that cancels a person's request unless he/she contacts us with a good address. In addition, of those "automatic request" ballots, only **250** came back voted. That leaves **4,124** ballots out and unaccounted for. We have received close to one hundred new address changes from some of these voters before and after the September 5 Primary and we are hoping that we will hear from many more, as we get closer to the November 7 general election. We are doing as much research as possible on the Returned Undeliverables, such as contacting family members still in the county, etc. but it would seem that this makes the voter's responsibility to advise us of his/her new address even more important now with this two-general-election cycle request section of HAVA. Having thousands of absentee ballots going out into limbo could seriously erode the security and integrity of an election, at least in the public's perception.

At this critical time in our nation, it is the duty and honor of every election official to fulfill every requirement of UOCAVA and HAVA, and to go beyond when state law permits, to make sure that our United State military members and families especially have the most opportunity to exercise their right to vote, and to have their votes counted.