

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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Wisconsin's Military and Overseas Voters Have New Online Absentee Ballot Delivery Option

MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Government Accountability Board this week launched a new website to deliver absentee ballots securely online to members of the military and U.S. citizens living permanently overseas.

“Until now, the only way our Wisconsin soldiers serving abroad could receive an absentee ballot was to contact their local clerk’s office,” said Kevin Kennedy, director and general counsel of the G.A.B. “Our new system provides an option for our military and overseas voters by expediting the ballot delivery. This new system also ensures that their ballots are received in time to be marked, returned and counted.”

As part of the new My Vote WI website (myvote.wi.gov), military and permanent overseas voters may request and receive their absentee ballot and certificate online. Military voters receive their ballots immediately while permanent overseas voters receive their ballots once they have been approved. They can then print those documents and mark and return their ballots by mail.

Military and permanent overseas voters will still need to mail their completed absentee ballots and certificates back to Wisconsin for counting, said Elections Division Administrator Nat Robinson. Ballots cannot be returned electronically.

“Wisconsin already has a great record of quickly serving its military and permanent overseas voters,” said Robinson, “but this new system will ensure all requests are honored immediately rather than being delayed, and their voting process will be faster and easier.”

More than 1,000 members of the military and their families already have absentee ballot requests on file in the Statewide Voter Registration System, and the G.A.B. has contacted them to let them know they may now use the system. As of Wednesday, 40 ballots had already been delivered. In the last presidential election in November 2008 there were 6,496 military and permanent overseas voter absentee ballots counted in Wisconsin.

Robinson noted that the G.A.B. received a \$1.9 million grant this year from the U.S. Department of Defense’s Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) to develop the online absentee ballot delivery system.

“We have built security measures into the website and our business processes to ensure that the physical locations of military service members are not revealed by their online activity, and that only legitimate ballots get counted,” Robinson said.

Military and permanent overseas voters may still request their local municipal clerks provide absentee ballots by email, fax or postal mail. While municipal clerks may opt out of the system, Robinson said it was built to save them time and keep them informed whenever a military or overseas voter from uses the website to request a ballot. Bottom line: Clerks never lose control over the balloting process for military voters. The clerks place the ballot online for access, they receive the ballots, and they examine the envelopes for legitimacy and sufficiency.

Detailed information about the online absentee ballot delivery system is available here: <http://gab.wi.gov/node/2571>.

Last year, the State of Wisconsin changed its election laws to comply with the new federal Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act and ensure that these voters have enough time to get their ballots back home to be counted. Federal law requires a minimum of 45 days, and State law now requires 47 days. However, because of delays in sending ballots by a few local election officials, the U.S. Department of Justice sought a federal consent decree for compliance that affects all of Wisconsin's 1,923 local election officials, and which will be effective through the Fall 2012 elections.

The My Vote WI online absentee ballot delivery system will help the State comply with the consent decree and provide the US DOJ. More importantly, it will assure that military and permanent overseas voters will receive their absentee ballots in a timely manner.

The new My Vote WI does much more than deliver absentee ballots overseas. The redesigned website, which incorporates the our popular Voter Public Access site, is for all Wisconsin voters, and includes the voter information and polling place lookups from VPA.

The G.A.B. will hold a news conference at 11 a.m. Tuesday, September 25, at its office in Madison to demonstrate the new My Vote WI website's features, and to launch the agency's new My Vote WI election app for smartphones. Officials will also discuss G.A.B.'s "Back to Basics" initiative to help ensure election workers and voters have a problem-free General Election on November 6.

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The Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) is responsible for administration and enforcement of campaign finance, elections, ethics and lobbying laws in Wisconsin. The G.A.B. is made up of six non-partisan, former judges and is supported by an agency of non-partisan staff members.