

National, Charleston voting info available via Internet

You can tell it's an election year, because there's a nonstop media barrage telling which candidates are saying what where. But where do military members find information on how to vote in their home districts?

Well, look no further than the Federal Voting Assistance Program Web site, <http://www.fvap.ncr.gov>. Program officials have created the "one-stop shop" for the roughly 6 million potential voters covered under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986.

The FVAP is responsible for informing and educating U.S. citizens worldwide of their right to vote, fostering voter participation and protecting electoral process integrity at federal, state and local levels.

To military members and civilian employees and their families stationed overseas, the different voting rules at federal, state and local levels may be as confusing as a maze. Perhaps the most important thing for them to know about absentee voting is how and why to fill out the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot, Standard Form 186.

When a Web site visitor clicks on "Learn About Absentee Voting," several links will lead to different information about the postcard-sized form, which isn't available online. Individuals are advised to see their unit voting assistance officer.

The site gives guidelines for determining or establishing a legal residence. Some service members mistakenly believe they may claim any

state as their legal residence or that their home of record is automatically their legal residence. Actually, they must meet certain requirements. For instance, a person must have a physical presence in a state and have an intent to remain or return.

Residency and other rules are spelled out by clicking on "Learn About Absentee Voting" and then on "Voting Residence for UOCAVA Citizens."

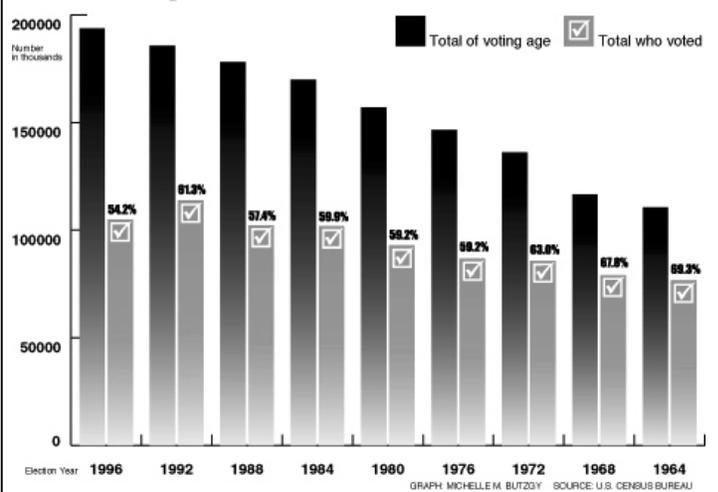
Other helpful features on the site include links to state election sites, a chart listing dates of all state primary elections, and answers to frequently asked questions. There is also a link to a U.S. House of Representatives page that lets visitors search for their representative by state and ZIP code.

The site further helps unit voting assistance officers by providing information on training and allowing them to download pamphlets and flyers about the Federal Voting Assistance Program.

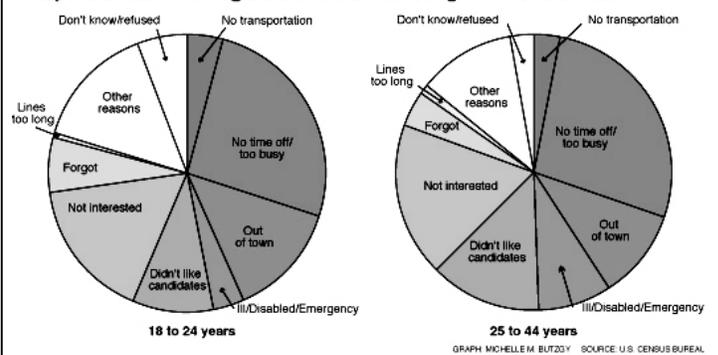
Voting information is also available on Charleston AFB.

"Voting is a right that every American citizen should exercise," said Staff Sgt. Jennifer Eagle, 437th Operations Support Squadron voting represent. "It is the foundation of our democratic and free society. Men and women have fought and died for this privilege; it should not be taken lightly. I feel as a military member it is even more important to vote, because in reality isn't that what we signed the dotted line for — to defend this freedom?" For more information, call your unit voting representative (AFPJ)

Ratio of total eligible to vote to total who voted from 1964 to 1996



Reported reason for registered voters not voting in November 1996



The big drop



Tech. Sgt. Cary Humphries, 1CTCS

Master Sgt. Robert Orr, a C-17 Loadmaster assigned to the 437th Operations Group, retrieves cables after dropping a containerized delivery system pallet over North Auxilliary Airfield during a local training mission. The C-17 was part of a nine-ship formation airdrop composed of aircraft from the 14th, 15th and 17th Airlift squadrons

MH-53

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package them (helicopters) up, airmail them into the objective area somewhere close, build them back up, check them out, check-fly them, and then they're ready to go."

The C-17's ability to easily load and carry outsized cargo, along with its ability to land on short, unimproved airfields, and its unique ground-handling capabilities make it the perfect airlift platform for Special Operations helicopters and other equipment.

Approximately 25 helicopter maintainers and 25 loadmasters benefited from one-on-one training on and off loading the MH-53 from the C-17.

"(The maintainers) did training on the way up here, and now they're practicing operating out of a forward location," said Master Sgt. John Bishop, chief loadmaster for C-17 special operations.

The procedures for loading the MH-53 are unusual, even for loadmasters trained to work with outsized cargo, said Bishop. For instance, the

struts on the helicopter need to be raised and lowered at various points on its way in and out of the aircraft.

The helicopter fills the back portion of the airlifter's cargo hold, just inches away from the Globemaster at places. A winch and a spreader bar are used to pull the helicopter into the cargo area. A tow bar on the nose landing gear makes it maneuverable.

It takes an hour for a proficient crew to load the helicopter and another hour to off load it.

During real-world operations, one loadmaster and six helicopter maintenance personnel work together to maneuver the helicopter on and off the C-17.

The training was conducted at Charleston AFB, instead of at Hurlburt Field, in order to maximize the number of loadmasters participating in the training.

The C-17 first carried the MH-53 Pave Low in April 1996 in support of the evacuation of personnel from Liberia. Since then, the C-17 has transported the special operations helicopter in support of operations in the Balkans.