

Military OneSource Podcast — Voting While in the Military

Federal Voting Assistance Program

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit MilitaryOneSource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast, I'm Bruce Moody. Today we're going to talk about voting. Specifically, how to request a voting ballot, how to cast your vote, how to meet your voting deadlines, all just critical, critical topics. Our guests today, we have Dr. Lisa Thomas and Brianna Paul they're with the Federal Voting Assistance Program. Great to have you with us. Welcome to the podcast.

Dr. Lisa Thomas:

Good morning, Bruce. Thank you for having me.

Brianna Paul:

Hello. Thanks for having me, Bruce. I'm happy to be here.

Bruce Moody:

Dr. Thomas, let's start with you. I really would like to have you describe what the Federal Voting Assistance Program is, and feel free to foot stomp the fact that you're actually part of the Defense Department, which is just awesome.

Dr. Lisa Thomas:

Absolutely. So, the Federal Voting Assistance Program is a federally mandated program, it falls directly under the Secretary of Defense. We execute the responsibilities of the president to ensure that our service members, their family members and overseas citizens are able to vote anywhere in the world.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, you have a whole mission that extends to civilians overseas, but we'll focus today on what the military experience is. You actually have served, and thank you for your service. Tell us a little bit about your experience in uniform because that included being a voting assistance officer. So voting assistance officer is kind of an extension into the

local command for the Federal Voting Assistance Program. How does that work, and what was that like for you?

Dr. Lisa Thomas:

Absolutely. For many of our service members while you're in the service you think that you cannot vote because you're away from your voting jurisdiction. So far from the truth. I served over 20 years of service in the Army, and it wasn't until my latter years that I was able to use the absentee voting process, and it was very simple. Unlike going to the poll station, I was able to do it and successfully doing it. And then as I became the installation voting assistant officer, I was able to introduce to many service members and family members that was unaware of that program to take advantage of their right to vote and vote from anywhere in the world using the Federal Voting Assistance Program resources.

Bruce Moody:

It's interesting you mentioned being able to vote from anywhere in the world. I voted absentee when I was in uniform. I voted absentee so many times that it was actually rare that I was actually going into a booth, a local precinct to vote. So, the absentee became kind of the norm for me. The most interesting example of voting while deployed there was an Army colonel who is deployed to the International Space Station. He participated in an election from orbit, which is very, very cool.

But Brianna, if you can come into the conversation, what I want to do is focus in on the steps to how people can vote. There's several steps that people really need to do and walk us through, this is the same for service members and family members who are trying to vote when they're away from home.

Brianna Paul:

Yes, Bruce. And when we talk about the steps, we want to remember that it's super simple and easy. It's basically a two-step process of making sure that you fill out, sign and send in your Federal Post Card Application to your local election office. And then you will receive your ballot once your local election office has processed and approved your form, and then they will send you your absentee ballot where you will fill that out and you will sign that and you will send that back to your local election office. So, it's a pretty simple process. We have all of the information that you could be looking for through fvap.gov or F-V-A-P.gov. You'll be able to find the forms there as well as the online assistant that you can use to help fill out the Federal Post Card Application in which you will still need to print out, sign and send to your local election office.

Bruce Moody:

Brianna, let's talk about this a little bit more. Just the importance of this application, where it can be found and what it really means in the voting process.

Brianna Paul:

Right, and as Lisa was talking about voting assistance officers, there's going to be voting assistance officers for each branch. So you have voting assistance officers within the Air Force, the Marines, the Navy, the Coast Guard, the Army, and they're all going to have those under them, the unit voting assistance officers, and they should be reaching out to those that are absentee voters to let them know that they have access to these forms, access to the fvap.gov website. And the Federal Post Card Application, it is very important because it actually simultaneously will re-register you and also request your absentee ballot. So, once you fill out this form and you send it into your local election office, it's going to register you and request your ballot and within 45 days of an election, your election office is going to send you your state absentee ballot. So you should be getting that form.

We also have a second form that's important called the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot, and that's a form that you would use in any chance that you do not receive your state absentee ballot after sending in your Federal Post Card Application. So, there are two ways to protect your right to vote and both of these forms are federally protected and reserve the right for you to send in your absentee ballot to your state. And you can find those again through the online assistant, which is a super easy way to fill out the form because this allows for all of the information that is required by your state to be automatically populated into the form. So, everything that is required will show up with a small asterisk, and if it's not required, it will not have that. You can also download the form through our site and fill it out, print it out and sign it, as well as reaching out to your local election office and letting them know that you've filled out the form and sent it in and making sure that they have received your Federal Post Card Application.

Bruce Moody:

Dr. Thomas, I want to keep this going. Where can I find my election officials' information? And as far as submitting my Federal Post Card Application, the timeline, I just really want to emphasize the importance of meeting the deadlines. How do you know what these deadlines are and how do you make sure that you're able to meet these deadlines?

Dr. Lisa Thomas:

So fvap.gov, you will go there. It's a very simple website to navigate. It's very simplistic for anyone to maneuver and find information like your local election office. You can type in your state. They'll populate your state and all of the counties and all of their contact information. It would also provide the dates for your deadlines, for your state, your forms, whether it be your ballot, your FPCA or your FWAB, Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot, the deadlines that they need to be sent and received by your state election office. So those would then again be found at fvap.gov. And I would stress to start the process very early, be voters ready and know your status ahead.

What's that saying that says the early bird catches the worm? So, you want to be that person that you're standing tall and you've received confirmation that your local officials

have received your Federal Post Card Application, either your FWAB or your state ballot. That's going to count as your vote in this upcoming presidential election.

Bruce Moody:

There we go. Early bird gets the worm. That's good advice. As we wrap up, I just invite any final words on the topic.

Brianna Paul:

I just want to add to Lisa, early Bird gets the worm. It's important to remember too, that once you've sent in your Federal Post Card Application or your FPCA, you can reach out to your election office and make sure about your registration, make sure that they received your form or that they've processed it. If something is missing on the form, they will reach out to you. But if there isn't anything missing on the form, they may not reach out. So, we do recommend that you reach out to your election office and just make sure that they've received your form. And of course, we're always here if you have any questions as well as your voting assistance officer, as Lisa was talking about, they have those trainings. So, they are there to help provide you guys with answers and make sure that if they can't provide those answers, they can send you our way. So, you could reach out to us at vote@fvap.gov, or you can call us at 1-800-438-8683. We are here every day, Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. Eastern time to 4 p.m. Eastern time.

Bruce Moody:

And there we go. We'll leave it there. So, we're going to put those numbers and all the links in the program notes. Dr. Lisa Thomas and Brianna Paul, they're with the Federal Voting Assistance Program. Great to have you with us today.

Dr. Lisa Thomas:

Thank you, Bruce, for having us.

Brianna Paul:

Yes, thank you, Bruce. It's been a great time.

Bruce Moody: Great to have you with us. And of course, once again, Federal Voting Assistance Program, part of the Defense Department, as is Military OneSource. We always want to hear from you, we have a link in the program notes. You can send us a comment, a question, an idea for a future episode, and be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts, because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.