

H. Res. 608

In the House of Representatives, U.S.,

May 12, 2004.

Whereas the members of the Armed Forces who are currently serving in very dangerous regions of the world deserve a modernized military postal system capable of improving the delivery and tracking of mail to United States forces serving in remote locations;

Whereas the current system relies on outmoded and labor intensive manual sorting processes that result in undue delays and the inability of the Department of Defense to track mail and determine the timeliness of mail delivery;

Whereas the manual sorting of mail intended for deployed members of the Armed Forces unnecessarily requires hours of labor from many troops, which could be used for other, more critical, duties if automation were used;

Whereas the very least our Nation can do for the members of our Armed Forces who are deployed halfway around the world and risking their lives to protect our freedoms is to ensure that they are able to receive the comfort of a letter from those waiting at home;

Whereas mail destined for deployed members of the Armed Forces that is delayed for long periods of time, or not delivered at all, negatively affects the morale of our deployed forces and their families at home;

Whereas the members of our Armed Forces have an unquestionable right to vote in the upcoming election, and the military postal system must not disenfranchise any military absentee voters because of delays in transmitting voting materials;

Whereas with the current military postal system it is not possible to determine the rate of “Undeliverable as Addressed” mail, it is therefore not possible to guarantee that all United States forces wishing to vote will be able to do so;

Whereas according to the recent General Accounting Office Report entitled “Operation Iraqi Freedom: Long-standing Problems Hampering Mail Delivery Need to be Resolved,” many of the same problems that plagued the military postal system during Operation Desert Storm have continued unabated and are now being experienced in Operation Iraqi Freedom, more than 12 years later;

Whereas according to the same General Accounting Office report, the Department of Defense does not have the ability to adequately assess the timeliness of mail and election ballot delivery because it does not have a reliable, accurate system in place;

Whereas according to the same General Accounting Office report, more than half of sampled members of the Armed Forces were dissatisfied with mail delivery, many waiting 4 weeks or longer to receive mail;

Whereas recent samplings of mail intended for deployed members of the Armed Forces shows that a percentage far exceeding the standard set for domestic mail is “Undeliverable as Addressed” and indicates that a large portion of our deployed troops are not receiving their mail;

Whereas the Military Postal Service Agency does not have the authority to formulate and effectively implement a joint service solution to the mail problems in the Iraq Theatre and the Department of Defense has not appointed a single agency to address military postal matters;

Whereas the recent court action in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, which granted the government's request to extend Pennsylvania's deadline for receipt of ballots from qualified overseas voters, correctly recognizes that mail operations can significantly impact voting rights and, in addition, is sufficient forewarning that the military mail system needs to be resolved before the next election; and

Whereas for at least 52 years, reformers have been attempting to improve the ability of the members of our Armed Forces to vote, as evidenced by a letter from President Harry S. Truman to Congress, dated from 1952, which clearly echoes the challenges we face: "Many of those in uniform are serving overseas, or in parts of the country distant from their homes. They are unable to return to their States either to register or to vote. Yet these men and women who are serving their country and in many cases risking their lives, deserve above all others to exercise the right to vote in this election year. At a time when these young people are defending our country and its free institutions, the least we at home can do is to make sure that they are able to enjoy the rights they are being asked to fight to preserve.": Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that—

(1) it is in the interest of the United States to immediately resolve long-standing military mail delivery problems so that our troops may receive mail from their families when they most need it;

(2) it is in the interest of the United States to immediately resolve long-standing military mail delivery problems so that our troops are not disenfranchised in the 2004 election;

(3) the Secretary of Defense should establish a system that expedites the delivery of election ballots to the members of our Armed Forces so that they may be counted in the election;

(4) the Secretary of Defense should establish a system that accurately tracks military postal transit times; and

(5) the House of Representatives stands ready to assist in resolving these issues.

Attest:

Clerk.