

Lucy Stensland Laederich

July 30, 2012

*On behalf of the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO), with over 15,000 members in 40 countries around the world, and the Association of Americans Resident Overseas (AARO), with another 1,000 members, primarily in Western Europe, I appreciate this opportunity to comment on the **2011 version of the FPCA**, used by overseas voters to register and request their ballots.*

As the FVAP knows, many of the people I represent were startled by the 2011 voter "Classification" block which asks people to declare their "intent to return" or lack thereof. Unlike the earlier wording, "residing abroad temporarily/indefinitely", this language raises both questions and concerns in the voter's mind:

- "return" where? To the United States, the voting state or the voting district?
- "return" when? Within some specified time frame?
- How definite must "intent" be? Must I have plans, or is mere possibility sufficient?
- What will be understood if I check "I do not intend to return"? Will I be assumed to be unpatriotic? Will my commitment to the voting process be questioned?
- What will be understood if I check "I intend to return"? Will I become subject to state tax even though I live abroad?

I understand that some states need to know "intent to return" but this needs to be made explicit on the print form as it is on the electronic form. This difference creates an inequality among voters – those who are informed and those who are not; those who are not informed will possibly refuse to swear to this kind of Catch-22 choice and simply not vote.

The final category is defined by totally incomprehensible language: "otherwise granted... voting rights under State law." Does this refer to the states where as-yet non-domiciled children are allowed to vote? Does it refer instead to the National Guard in some states, as was explained to one of my members by the FVAP Help Desk in May ("You can find who is qualified in the Voting Assistance Guide. It is currently only 8 States. This would not affect any overseas citizens. It covers our National Guard members called up to the State level.")?

In short, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for many average overseas voters to "check the classification that best represents their current situation".

The instructions for Block 1 on the 2005 form, while not perfect, are clear and do partially explain the ramifications of one's choice. The 2011 form lacks and badly needs this explanation.

In that connection, I think it essential to have a printed version of the FPCA which is as "stand-alone" as possible. If people are using the print form, it is because they do not have a computer at hand. The likelihood that they have access to a Voting Assistance Guide in either print or electronic form is therefore very small. In addition, finding

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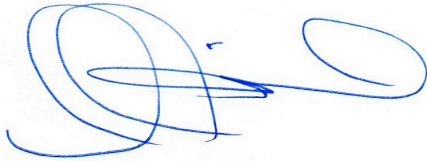
anything in the VAG is difficult (I have still not found, without going through the instructions for all 55 states and territories, the clarification of that final voter classification category). The less the voter is advised to “check the Voting Assistance Guide”, the better.

Another thing on the 2005 form which I would personally like to see on any subsequent form is the warning at the top as to false information. There is virtually no voter fraud but there is a tremendous lot of talk about it; I therefore think a warning placed in clear evidence and in bold, as in 2005, is a good idea.

One thing on the new form, not found in 2005, is the recommendation to rank ballot receipt preference from 1 to 3 and the reminder to “be sure appropriate contact information is provided”. This is a new and very positive addition.

The two organizations I represent spearheaded the fight in the early 70s to obtain the vote for overseas Americans. Since then, we have actively registered voters and worked with Congress to improve the process of voting from overseas. We welcome this opportunity to do that again and sincerely hope that this crucial form can be improved – we also sincerely hope to be consulted during the process of revision.

Very sincerely,



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