

Objections to the new FPCA wording

I strongly urge that FVAP drop the new wording used in section 1 of the 2011 Federal Postcard Application (FPCA), and return to that used in the 2005 version. In the 2005 version, overseas civilians identify themselves as being abroad either “temporarily” or “indefinitely”. This wording is both simple and comprehensive, covering all citizens, whether born in the United States or abroad.

In contrast, the new wording is complicated, and carries the danger of disfranchising a number of Americans. This would be wrong under any circumstances, but is particularly unfortunate in view of the continuing problem of low turnout in US elections. (As citizens living within the US may not know, turnout in other developed democracies is often much higher: 80–90% in the country where I live, in contrast to the 57% achieved in the US 2008 election.)

The new wording creates several problems; the most important are that it:

1. excludes citizens born abroad who may never have established adult residency in the US;
2. complicates a form that already arouses a lot of anxiety in citizens who do not regularly work with it, and thus reduces their chances of completing it correctly and then voting; and
3. demands that citizens make a declaration of intent, when they may not be sure of their intentions.

From my point of view, therefore, this experiment has failed, and it’s time to go back to the tried-and-true wording. In view of FVAP’s great success in making its website more user-friendly, it is particularly unfortunate that FVAP has made voters’ very first step in the FPCA so difficult to take.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I do so as the chair of the Voting from Overseas Committees of both the American Women’s Club of Denmark (www.awcdenmark.org) and its mother organization, FAWCO (www.fawco.org), which brings together about 15,000 people in about 40 organizations located all over the world.

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