



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Malcolm Smith

Senate Honors Our Military This Memorial Day by Advancing Voting Rights Bill for Those Serving Abroad

MALCOLM A. SMITH May 22, 2009

In recognition of the outstanding service of our military personnel this Memorial Day, the New York State Senate will be working in the weeks ahead to pass legislation which would make it significantly easier for military and other overseas voters to apply for and obtain an absentee ballot, and to expand the time frame for returning these ballots.

The bill (S5595) extends the time in which an absentee ballot can be received after an election. All ballots will be counted that are received by the Board of Elections no later than seven days following a primary election, or thirteen days following a general or special election. Additionally, for the first time ever voters overseas will be able to fax or e-mail their request for an absentee ballot.

“Nothing matters more than including the brave men and women who serve our nation in the armed forces in the electoral process,” said the bill’s sponsor, Senate Majority Leader Malcolm A. Smith. “Voting is a fundamental right in our country, yet it is unnecessarily difficult for those members of the military courageously protecting our country thousands of miles away to cast a ballot. By extending the time in which a ballot can be received and through taking advantage of common sense technology, this new legislation will ensure that their votes and voices matter. These new options for New Yorkers in various corners of the

world will allow them to remain connected to their home.”

Currently, in order for an absentee ballot to be counted it must be postmarked no later than the day before an election, and received by the Board of Elections no later than seven days following an election. However, this limited time frame is restrictive for those serving our nation abroad, as their ballots must travel thousands of miles.

“As we reflect on the sacrifices of our military personnel this weekend, it is fitting for the Elections Committee and Senate to determine new and more efficient ways to ensure that these absentee ballots are counted for every election,” said Elections Committee Chair Joseph P. Addabbo (D-Howard Beach). “These individuals are working to preserve the very right that they are too often excluded from and with this revised legislation, the entire absentee ballot process will be made more accessible for those abroad.”

It currently takes as much as 75 days to request, receive and return an absentee ballot. Allowing New York’s service men and women abroad, and others, to fax in their absentee ballot request could cut up to 24 days off the entire absentee ballot voting process. This will result in many more votes being cast and counted.