



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Kennedy Calls for New System to Ensure National Guard Members Get Opportunity to Vote

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY November 5, 2012

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Local National Guard members responding to Superstorm Sandy may miss opportunity to vote in this year's presidential election.

Kennedy says brave men and women called into duty by disaster or security threat should have a chance to cast ballots.

Kennedy: When disaster strikes, the National Guard is there for New York State. Going forward, the state needs to be there for them and ensure they get ballots for commander-in-chief.

BUFFALO, N.Y. – When Superstorm Sandy struck New York, hundreds of Western New Yorkers who serve in the National Guard arrived at the scene to help with storm response and rescue. However, now that they've been called into duty, many of them may miss their opportunity to vote in this year's presidential election. In response to calls he received from constituents today, Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, is calling for a new plan to be put in place to ensure National Guard members have the opportunity to vote in all future elections, even if they are unexpectedly called into duty as a result of natural disaster, national-security threat or other emergency event.

Kennedy is calling for a new plan that would bring together information held by the NYS Division of Naval and Military Affairs, the National Guard and county Boards of Elections. Active members of the National Guard would automatically receive an absentee ballot from their local elections board each year for the primary and general elections, rather than re-applying for a ballot year after year. Due to the nature of their service, it is impossible to predict when Guard members may be called into duty for disaster relief. As a result, unforeseen events could deprive them of the opportunity to vote, if they did not apply for an absentee ballot beforehand.

“When disaster strikes, the National Guard is there for New York State. Going forward, the state needs to be there for them and ensure members of the National Guard get ballots to have their say for commander-in-chief,” said Senator Kennedy. “By adopting this common-sense plan, New York State will make certain that the brave men and women who serve in the National Guard and other branches always have the opportunity to vote, regardless of natural disaster, national-security threat or any other emergency event. Natural disasters and emergency situations are unpredictable, but a new absentee-balloting system would help Guard members remain prepared for the unexpected.”

The state currently has a system that ensures individuals with disabilities receive an absentee ballot every year after they apply for status as a permanent absentee. Kennedy's proposal would work similarly – when an active member of the National Guard applies for an absentee ballot and indicates their service as the reason for their potential absence, county Boards of Elections would then automatically send them absentee ballots for primary and general elections until they are discharged from their service.

This will ensure National Guard members are prepared to vote from the day they start their training until their date of discharge, even if they are suddenly called into duty. Kennedy wants this proposed system to apply to the New York Army National Guard, New York Air National Guard, New York Naval Militia and the New York Guard.

Unfortunately, many men and women serving in the National Guard may not have the opportunity to vote in this year's election. Kennedy wants a new system adopted before next year's local elections.

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Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 58th District, which is comprised of the towns of Cheektowaga, Eden, Hamburg and West Seneca, the city of Lackawanna and parts of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.