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TOM COLE
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3604

November 2, 2012

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Panetta:

I am writing to express concern that the Department of Defense's Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA) top recommendations have not been implemented, leaving a large number of our overseas military service members without their 2012 election ballots.

As you know, the MPSA recommended that DoD develop a centralized mail forwarding system similar to the Postal Automated Redirection System (PARS) used by the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) for overseas addresses. Under the antiquated mail redirection procedures currently used by DoD, the one-way transit time for blank ballots redirected to or from overseas typically ranges from two weeks to over a month, depending on the overseas location and other operational factors. The PARS system is designed to cut the average transit time for redirected ballots to just three days, according to United States Postal Service.

For years our overseas service members have faced longstanding obstacles to their participation in elections. Implementing the MPSA recommendations is a critically important step to complete in advance of an election and a key DoD responsibility. Therefore, I encourage you to take action and modernize the mail forwarding system for redirecting blank ballots, so that our service members do not encounter the same obstacles to voting in the next election cycle.

I appreciate your attention to this important matter. Thank you for your continued service to our nation.

Sincerely,



Tom Cole
Member of Congress