

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2503

March 3, 2004

The Honorable Les Brownlee
Acting Secretary of the Army
Army Pentagon Rm 3E732
The Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20310-0102

Dear Secretary Brownlee:

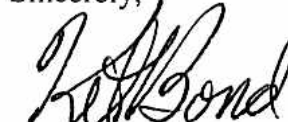
As we discussed last week, I am troubled about the ongoing problems with overseas mail delivery to the troops. I am even more concerned about how we are going to avoid the problems that caused the absentee ballot crisis of the 2000 election. The 2004 defense appropriations bill included language that requested the GAO to do an immediate study of the overseas mail delivery problem. I understand that the GAO will recommend improvements to the Pentagon's mail system. Unfortunately the GAO's findings will not be released until April 21, 2004.

I urge you, as the Acting Secretary of the Army responsible for DoD mail delivery, to modernize the mail delivery system so that members of the armed services are not denied the opportunity to have their absentee ballots counted. There are 29 states that by state law require absentee ballots to be received by mail, and other states that make absentee ballots by mail available. Additionally, there are almost 200,000 activated Reservists now serving in many distant locations far away from their normal voting districts. Under the current system there is ample reason to suspect that when these troops vote many will not have their votes counted.

It is my understanding that a decision to implement new technology must be made by the end of March in order to have the system up and running in sufficient time to handle the processing of ballots. Most absentee ballots are mailed 4-6 weeks before the election, so you can see that the time frame is growing short. I am very concerned that if action is delayed until the GAO releases its report in late April that DoD will lose the opportunity to turn the situation around in time for the election, with the result that the Congress will be in the position of explaining to our constituents how and why military personnel still cannot be assured their votes will be counted.

Our troops' voting rights should have the highest priority as we head into the 2004 election. I am asking for your commitment to cut through the bureaucracy to ensure that every fighting man and woman overseas gets the right to vote. If anyone has earned the right to have a vote counted, it is our military forces currently engaged in the Global War on Terror.

Sincerely,



Christopher S. Bond

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March 3, 2004

The Honorable Dov S. Zakheim
Comptroller and Chief Financial Officer
Office of the Secretary of Defense
1100 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1100

Dear Mr. Zakheim:

It has come to my attention that the military postal system is not optimized to handle the thousands of absentee ballots that will be mailed prior to the November election. I am even more concerned about how we are going to avoid the problems that caused the absentee ballot crisis of the 2000 election. Accordingly, I have asked Acting Secretary of Army Les Brownlee to modernize the postal system now to prevent overseas troops from being denied the right to vote this fall as the result of absentee ballots being delayed or lost in the mail. The Congress called for a GAO study of mail delivery problems in the FY04 defense authorization and appropriations bills. Unfortunately any action based on the report, due out in late April, will provide insufficient time to make the necessary improvements prior to the November election.

With our troops fighting for freedom abroad, we need to do everything we can to ensure their votes are counted on Election Day. With only nine months left until the November election this must be a top priority. Mail delays not only deny our troops the fundamental right to vote, but also take their toll on troop morale. The Air Force Times reported last June that the amount of backed-up mail in the Iraq war zone was enough to cover three football fields stacked ten feet high. The mail delivery system cannot be improved expeditiously without your support, therefore I urge you to move quickly in support of Secretary Brownlee so that the Army can quickly acquire and install modern equipment and improve the mail processing system.

It is my understanding that a decision to irplement new technology must be made by the end of March in order to have a viable system up and running in sufficient time to handle the processing of ballots. Most absentee ballots are mailed 4-6 weeks before the election, so you can see that the time frame is growing short. I urge you to help Secretary Brownlee cut through the bureaucracy to ensure that the mail system can be modernized in time to make a positive difference in the way absentee ballots are handled and delivered prior to the November election.

Sincerely,



Christopher S. Bond