

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 20, 2019

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Megan Brennan
Postmaster General
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, DC 20260

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Postmaster General Brennan:

We write to express concern about the potential withdrawal of the United States from the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and its potential effects on the voting rights of servicemembers and Americans living overseas.

The UPU is made up of 192 member nations and is the international organization responsible for establishing terminal dues, which postal systems charge for the local delivery of inbound international mail. In addition, it serves as the primary forum for collaboration between postal systems on issues including mail security, speed of service, and mail access.

On August 23, 2018, President Trump issued a memorandum stating that “current international postal practices in the UPU do not align with United States economic and national security interests.” On October 17, 2018, the White House announced the United States would withdraw from the UPU within one year, and concurred with a State Department recommendation that the United States adopt self-declared postal rates no later than January 1, 2020. The UPU held a special meeting in April 2019 to address these concerns and will hold an Extraordinary Congress on September 24-25, 2019 to vote on terminal dues reform proposals. Based on the outcome of the Extraordinary Congress, the United States could withdraw from the UPU as soon as October 17, 2019, continue as a UPU member and reform the terminal dues system, or choose another course of action.

Uncertainty surrounding U.S. withdrawal from the UPU or significant reforms to international postage rates, in the midst of upcoming elections, could have the unintended consequence of making it harder and more expensive for overseas servicemembers and civilians to vote.

According to the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) – the federal organization charged with ensuring that Americans can vote from anywhere in the world – three million Americans living overseas and 1.3 million active duty servicemembers are covered by the *Uniformed Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act*, which allows these citizens to cast absentee ballots while abroad.¹ Reports indicate that it can be difficult for Americans overseas to vote. According to a 2016 Government Accountability Office report, “some military and overseas voters who rely solely on mail delivery may not have enough time to both request a blank ballot

¹ <https://www.naco.org/blog/us-withdrawal-international-postal-union-creates-uncertainty-county-election-administrators>


and cast their vote.”² Significant international postal changes or withdrawal from the UPU could exacerbate these concerns and may have detrimental effects on voter participation.

Voter participation by overseas voters is already a concern, with only 6.9% of eligible overseas Americans participating in the 2016 election (the national rate was 61.4%).³ Members of the military are particularly affected by issues related to casting a ballot from abroad. FVAP reports that there is a persistent myth that ballots from deployed servicemembers are not properly counted. In order to address this, FVAP and the United States Postal Service (USPS) conducted a pilot program that allowed members of the military to track their ballots. The Military Ballot Tracking Program was a resounding success with 98% of participants either satisfied or very satisfied. The Senate passed 2020 *National Defense Authorization Act* includes a provision that would require FVAP to conduct a comprehensive study on how to scale the Ballot Tracking Program to all military and overseas voters. We must build on this progress and work to ensure that Americans overseas can easily vote. Withdrawing from the UPU without a plan to protect voters from postal disruptions or unexpected increases in mailing costs would be a step in the wrong direction, and could potentially disenfranchise Americans living abroad.


Potential withdrawal from the UPU is already bringing significant uncertainty to the process by which overseas ballots are mailed out and returned, and reports indicate that there is growing concern about this issue and the lack of a contingency plan should the U.S. withdraw. Accordingly, we respectfully request that by October 1, 2019, the State Department and the Postal Service provide the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration and the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee with a proactive plan to address these issues should the United States withdraw from the UPU.

We look forward to reviewing the plan and working with you to ensure that all Americans, regardless of where they live or serve in uniform, can cast a ballot without undue burden.

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

² Government Accountability Office. (April 2016). DOD Needs More Comprehensive Planning to Address Military and Overseas Absentee Voting Challenges (GAO-16-378). <https://www.gao.gov/assets/680/676714.pdf>

³ 2016 Overseas Citizen Population Analysis Report, FVAP (Sept. 2018), <https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Reports/FVAP-2016-OCPA-FINAL-Report.pdf>.