

Democracy is a Year-Round Business ... VOTE!

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WASHINGTON (NNS) -- With the 2014 mid-term election in their wake, Sailors might be tempted to forget about absentee voting and politics in general until 2016.

"Not so fast," said Lt. Whit Abraham, the Navy Voting Action Officer.

Odd-numbered years are historically considered "off-years" for voting, and draw fewer voters to the polls. So why should Sailors think about voting now?

Although they often take a back seat to national races, local elections are just as important. Sailors stationed far from home have family members in their hometowns, and may even intend to reside there permanently at some point. Odd-year elections drive important community issues - issues with direct consequences for voters.

"2015 marks many statewide races, mayoral and town elections, and even some special elections for Congress," said Abraham, who manages the Navy's Voting Assistance Program from Washington, D.C.. "The local officials up for election in 2015 are the ones who set property tax rates for municipalities and school districts, they're the folks who administer police departments and maintain millions of miles of local roads and bridges, and in many states the judges -- from state Supreme Courts down to local district judges -- are on the ballot this year as well. So you can argue that many of these local officeholders have more to do with the daily lives of American citizens day in and day out than any other elected officials."

As defenders of the right to vote, Sailors are encouraged to participate. "Absentee voting is easy, but the key is giving the process time," said Abraham.

A major first step in the process is visiting the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) website at <http://www.fvap.gov>. Here, Sailors can click on their state or territory to get detailed information about registration guidelines and local elections.

Sailors wishing to vote absentee should complete an electronic Federal Post Card Applications (FPCA) early in 2015. The FPCA is a registration form, a request for a ballot, and the preferred way to update your address. Filling out and returning the FPCA updates local election officials on a member's absentee status, and it is especially important if Sailors and spouses have changed duty stations. "An updated FPCA puts you on the radar screen," said Abraham. "When the time comes to mail ballots later this year, election officials will know how to reach you."

Across the Navy, voting assistance is administered at the unit level. Voting assistance officers are appointed by their commanding officer and are trained by the Federal Voting Assistance Program.



Yeoman 2nd Class Franchesca Thomas, assigned to Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic, drops her vote into the ballot box during a Women's Equality Day event on the quarterdeck of Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Chad A. Bascom)

Besides accessing the FVAP website, voters can speak directly to these individuals who stand ready to assist Sailors and family members.

"Democracy is a year-round business, and so is the Navy Voting Assistance Program. Elections are always happening, and we encourage people to ask questions and take a proactive stance" said Abraham. "We're here to ensure your voice is heard - not just in Washington, but in your local community as well. That's what this year is all about."