

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 14, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
U.S. Senate Democratic Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

We write today as veterans who swore an oath to protect Americans' constitutional rights—including the right to vote in free and fair elections. We understand that voting by mail is an essential part of protecting that constitutional right. As we approach the election season in this presidential year, we urge you to bring forth and pass HEROES Act provisions that fund state elections so states can expand access to the ballot box, including through vote-by-mail.

As you know, the HEROES Act—passed by the House and awaiting action in the Senate—would provide \$3.6 billion to state and local election administrators to ensure systems are prepared for challenges related to COVID-19. This funding would build upon the \$400 million investment in election infrastructure from the CARES Act and would provide the estimated \$4 billion election experts estimate is needed to safely administer elections this fall. Importantly, the HEROES Act would ensure states can expand opportunities to vote-by-mail.

Voting by mail has long been trusted among military personnel serving abroad—millions of whom have voted by mail in the last few decades. Unfortunately, upon returning home, many servicemembers and veterans are denied access to absentee voting, particularly those living in states with restrictive laws over who can apply for and receive a mailed ballot. It shouldn't be harder for military service members and veterans to vote on U.S. soil than to vote abroad.

It is particularly important that veterans have access to vote-by-mail during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly 50% of veterans are over the age of 65 and many younger veterans have pre-existing respiratory conditions resulting from overseas burn pits. Because of this, veterans are at higher risk of getting sick from COVID-19 and may need to avoid in-person polling places when voting. Even veterans who already utilize vote-by-mail may experience challenges if states do not have the infrastructure to manage increased demand due to COVID-19.

We've already witnessed during the spring and summer primaries how quickly elections can go awry in states ill-equipped for handling mass surges in mailed ballots. Election systems in places like Wisconsin and Georgia were overwhelmed by unprecedented reliance on vote-by-mail and many voters who requested absentee ballots never received them, resulting in long lines at in-person polling places. Across the country, countless Americans have been forced to choose between protecting their health and exercising the fundamental right to vote. Voting conditions have been deficient during this year's primaries, but they will be even more sub-par in November unless substantial changes are made.

We've heard the President, who has a documented history of voting by mail, raise concerns about voter fraud and abuse. These claims have been roundly criticized as false, with the non-partisan Brennan Center

for Justice stating: “It is still more likely for an American to be struck by lightning than to commit mail voting fraud.” Moreover, states use several tools to address security concerns and ensure the accuracy of votes cast by mail, including tracking mail ballots via bar codes and signature matching. There also are harsh federal criminal and civil penalties for committing fraud using a mail ballot.

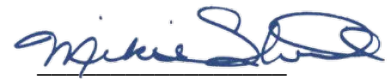
Some other common concerns are that vote-by-mail is a new, untested process, that it is partisan, and that it benefits only Democrats. Vote-by-mail is not new: in the 2018 midterms, more than 26% of Americans voted by mail. It has bipartisan support: a recent Reuters poll found that 79% of Democrats and 65% of Republicans support vote-by-mail to mitigate public health risks during the pandemic. And it does not advantage either party: Republicans win elections in states that have moved to universal or mostly vote-by-mail systems, Utah being the best example.

We have a sacred duty to honor those who have selflessly served our nation, and that includes ensuring they have access to the same freedoms they fought valiantly to protect. As you enter negotiations on the Senate’s version of the HEROES Act, we urge you to think of our nation’s men and women in uniform and our veteran community. We implore you to honor the service and sacrifice of our nation’s veterans and include \$3.6 billion for election funding—including funding for vote-by-mail.


Sincerely,



JASON CROW
Member of Congress



MIKIE SHERRILL
Member of Congress



ANTHONY G. BROWN
Member of Congress

/S/
SANFORD D. BISHOP, Jr.
Member of Congress

/S/
GILBERT R. CISNEROS, Jr.
Member of Congress

/S/
CHRISSY HOULAHAN
Member of Congress

/S/
CONOR LAMB
Member of Congress

/S/
SETH MOULTON
Member of Congress

/S/
MAX ROSE
Member of Congress

/S/
MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress

