



Thank you to the Commissioners for your invitation to present today, 21 September 2006, at the EAC Public Meeting in St. Louis, Missouri. I am Susan Dzieduszycka-Suinat, Executive Director of Overseas Vote Foundation. This paper has been presented in advance for your review.

### **The Challenge**

The challenges in implementing the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voter program, widely acknowledged and variously enumerated, are persistent. In 2000, the critical need to redress the barriers faced by overseas voters – uniformed and civilian – garnered new attention in the wake of the federal election. Public awareness of the key role of the growing population of overseas voters grew proportionally. Yet by 2004, UOCAVA program implementation had yet to make similar large strides.

Ultimately, UOCAVA was passed to ensure that all Americans, wherever they are, can vote and participate in our democracy -- and it is an excellent program for showing off our democracy around the world.

### **A Closer Look at the Situation/Problem/Challenges**

OVF's post election research following the 2004 federal election provides evidence of high rates of disenfranchisement for voters participating in the UOCAVA program: 19% of responding voters who wanted to vote received their ballot after the election or not at all, while another 24% reported that they received their ballots too late to send back in time for counting. Problems stemmed from voters not registering early enough, illegible handwriting, inaccuracies, omissions and incorrect addresses. Based on overseas voters' response, one can logically conclude that state and local election officials (LEOs) did not have sufficient time to process voter registration forms or to answer questions. UOCAVA voter registration and ballot requests must be received early and the process must be designed to eliminate inaccuracies. To increase the number of voters, the registration system needs to be accessible. To encourage overseas voters to vote, we must replace processes that are cryptic, complex, and inaccessible with ones that are with user-friendly, simple and accessible.

### **Our Mission and Solution**

**OVF's mission is to facilitate and increase participation of American overseas voters and military voters and their dependents in federal elections.**

Underlying our mission is OVF's resolve to provide a comprehensive and rapid response to help eligible citizens exercise their right to vote.



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**We accomplish our mission by providing free public access to innovative Internet-based voter services and support to UOCAVA voters.**

OVF's solution comprises a complete suite of integrated Internet-based voter services. This interrelated set of user-friendly, accessible and flexible web-based applications facilitates UOCAVA voter registration and ballot requests, and provides information and support. Our effort is maintained for voters, not parties; for all states and all candidates without distinction.

### **Overseas Vote Foundation – Rigorous, Rapid, and Responsive**

OVF is far more than just an organization providing an online click-thru program. After thoroughly analyzing the problems that overseas voters face, OVF created a complete resource base for UOCAVA voters at one location without compromising their security, safety, identities, or confidentiality.

To be of value to the voter, the right services must be provided in a timely and efficient manner. As overseas voters ourselves, we can truly empathize with their concerns and fully understand their expectations. It is as much the *how*, as the *what*. It is about the identity of the organization and how we operate/interact with voters. This is not something we *have* to do – it is something we *want* to do.

Overseas Vote Foundation (OVF) team comprises talented, expert and experienced staff, advisors and volunteers that draw upon a wide range of public and private sector knowledge, brought to bear in our approach UOCAVA voter services. OVF has demonstrated new, common sense technical approaches and implementation procedures in an accelerated timeframe.

### **Our Organization**

OVF is the first and only nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)(3) public charity to focus exclusively on providing voter services and support to American civilians living overseas and to the active duty members of the armed forces and their dependents who fall under UOCAVA. I stress that we are a nonpolitical, non-party-driven, and non-governmental website. Many voters appreciate this. Our structure is as follows:

An **Executive Board** spanning continents: James Brenner, Chair, is Managing Director of Broad Cove Partners and a Director of its Middle-East North Africa regional affiliate, RHMK, and lives in Cambridge, MA. I am the Executive Director, living in Munich. My background is in software technology marketing with more than a decade with a leading UNIX operating systems company. Chip Levensgood, Treasurer, is dividing his time between his two homes in Madrid and Maryland. Chip is a retired investment banker with experience spanning the globe with nongovernmental organizations. We are honored to have recently welcomed a new member to our Executive Board, one whom I am very proud to announce, and that is Ray Martinez, former Vice Chair at the EAC.

There is an opening on our Executive Board for a new Vice Chair. The position was formerly held by Cameron Quinn whom we sorely miss since her departure to the Department of Justice which does not permit her to simultaneously hold her position on our board. OVF is currently seeking a candidate with a remarkably similar profile as Cameron's to fill the role of Vice Chair.



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Our **Advisory Board** shows breadth, diversity and fundamental support for our mission from key constituencies/stakeholders:

- Brian Baysinger, DC Liaison, OVF
- Jeff Doyon, Chief Financial Officer
- Lucy Stensland Laederich, US Liaison, FAWCO
- Dr. Michael P. McDonald, Assoc Prof. GMU and Visiting Fellow, Brookings Institution
- Robert "Bo" Newsome, Director of Outreach and State Relations, NAICU/NCVRP
- Leslie D. Reynolds, Executive Director, NASS
- Samuel F. Wright, Director of Mil Voting Rights Project, NDC

The invaluable contributions of many and in particular, Sam Wright of NDC and Leslie Reynolds of NASS have given OVF a foothold from the outset.

OVF has established a successful Alliance program which dovetails with our outreach as depicted in the diagram. Each Alliance partner helps us reach another group of voters. As this has been developed over this Midterm election season, we foresee it coming into fruition and bringing increasing value over time, and in particular, in the next election cycle. Largely based in DC, our Advisors and our Alliance partners form a strong base for OVF in the US to balance our overseas presence.

Note that operationally, we are volunteer-run, with the majority of our staff overseas. Our organizational objective is to maintain both an overseas and a DC presence, and to be active in both realms. That brings insight and value.

### **The OVF Suite of Integrated Voter Services**

The OVF suite of integrated voter services work together in combination to produce **real VALUE for the voter**. Coming to the OVF site is meant to be an **interactive, high-value experience**. It is the “here’s what” together with the “how.” It is *practical* and it is *pleasant*.

- **RAVA** Eases UOCAVA registration processes through professionally designed user-friendly software
- **Election Official Directory** Provides accurate and complete LEO contact database
- **Voter Help Desk** Offers prompt and friendly voter support
- **Voter Alerts and FAQs** Improves access to and communication of key voter information
- **Hot Topics** Provide further related information

The three principal services that OVF offers are RAVA for voter registration, the EOD for election official contact information and the online Voter Help Desk. We receive direct feedback on a daily basis from satisfied voters regarding these services. The suite represents precisely what we mean when we say: interactive, high-value complete solution. Our services were launched on schedule beginning on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, and announced to the press and public at one month intervals. Timely availability provided LEOs and voters enough time before the upcoming election to understand and use the services. Complete testing was done prior to the launch date and was so successful that we have been 100% operational from our launch date.



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### ***OVF RAVA – Registration and Absentee Voter Application***

OVF's voter registration solution, RAVA, is a secure web-application that helps the voter to complete and generate the official federal voter registration (FPCA) form confidently and accurately. The wizard-style application prompts the voter for information unique to his or her particular state requirements. There are continuous error checks of input assuring that the voter has a complete form meeting his/her state requirements and none other.

RAVA generates an official, completed FPCA form in PDF format and provides the voter's correct local election office mail-in address and state-specific instructions. RAVA eliminates the need to individually research, identify, and complete unique state regulations and mailing instructions. It even flags the voter when a particular state requires a notarized signature. In turn the LEO is pleased to receive a legible, accurate FPCA so that a ballot can be sent out to that voter without delay.

### ***OVF Election Official Directory***

The OVF Election Official Directory (EOD) is our most actively used service. It represents the type of online resource that OVF is now known for – practical, maintainable, based on safe technology that improves the UOCAVA voter experience. This online voter service provides contact information for all US local election offices and enables voters to more easily contact their local election official or the election official specifically charged with the UOCAVA program.

The EOD is a simple, yet highly effective way of coordinating a tremendous amount of dynamic information into an Internet-based web tool that can be relied on to meet multiple objectives. Unique and highly significant in regards to the proposed effort: OVF has an ongoing and positive relationship with many Local Election Officials (LEOs) across the nation. LEOs are familiar with OVF and participate in the maintenance of their own data on the EOD. Contact information provided includes physical address, mailing address, phone numbers, fax numbers, websites, and email addresses. The EOD is also offered as a licensed service to other organizations. The National Association of Secretaries of State have officially licensed the Election Official Directory as a fully-hosted service and are using it as a NASS branded popup directory tool on their new *CanIVote.org* website.

Election groups abroad and within the United States are using the OVF EOD daily too – two examples are Poll workers Pollworkers for Democracy and our Alliance partner the Federation of Women's Clubs Overseas.

### ***OVF Voter Help Desk Support Service***

OVF's Voter Help Desk Support Service provides personal and timely voter registration guidance. The service is administered via email.

The Voter Help Desk completes the suite with a personal, immediate means of communication. It is online, simple, quick, preset for ease-of-use, and designed specifically for UOCAVA voters. The Voter Help Desk has built the trust of voters because it is reliable and answers each question individually within 12 hours. OVF understands the importance of providing the overseas voter with a prompt, succinct answer in a friendly tone. The Voter Help Desk keeps OVF's finger on the pulse: our team members can determine and evaluate UOCAVA voters' concerns through daily, immediate contact with them.



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The additional services of Membership Mailing Lists, General Informational Mailings, Voter Alerts, Hot Topics and static resources such as registration deadline lists and easily navigable FAQs complete the website voter service offering.

### **Practical Approach**

OVF has solved particular problems of UOCAVA voter registration – not to be underestimated in their value to voters and LEOs. The complete set of services is now available over the Internet. The complexity of the manual process has been removed in favor of an assisted user-friendly approach. Accuracy in completing the forms has been significantly improved, and legibility is no longer an issue with printed, completed forms. Lastly, the information is presented in a friendly manner that voters expect and value.

The OVF Suite of Voter Services is an example of “whole-product thinking.” The OVF team has done an outstanding job of producing not just one service, but a combination UOCAVA voter services that work together to meet virtually all overseas voter registration needs.

### **Real Value in Timely Reporting – Who are the Voters?**

The website allows ongoing insight into voter registration trends. There is a lot of traffic and any organization can report hits to their site. These large numbers being quite impressive, however, OVF aims to provide further distilled and meaningful data. Vitally important is the most obvious: which countries or regions do they live in and which states do they vote in? Not only do election officials want to better understand UOCAVA voter profiles, but elected representatives are curious to know the percentage of military and civilian voters registering to vote and where the votes from overseas are coming from.

The following three slides depict: 1) The percentage breakdown of votes in terms of the top ten states voters are registering in. Imagine if it were a million or two votes that were being divided into these percentages? Would those be significant numbers? 2) A view of where the voters who are registering online through OVF are currently residing; 3) And the last slide breaks down the types of voters are coming to the OVF site. From this slide you can see that our site is mainly be used by overseas civilians, but not many members of the uniformed services.

### **Survey and Research Program**

OVF is the first organization to develop and execute such a successful initiative as our 2004 Post Election Survey. The survey instrument was developed online and administered over the Internet and garnered an outstanding response rate – a reflection of voter trust as much as the professionalism of the survey, its implementation and design.

Key points regarding the 2004 Post Election Survey:

- Sent to 64,000 overseas voters
- 17% response rate
- 11,000 respondents
- Published online: June 2005

We are committed to a continued program of Post Election Surveys, analysis of voter trends, in-depth understanding of real voter issues; and ensuing recommendations.



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2006 Post Election Survey will be executed and published in collaboration with the UC Berkeley Election Administration Research Center

## **Outreach Efforts**

Increasing voter enfranchisement requires extensive communications on multiple levels. We attempt to use both virtual and physical means in our outreach actions. OVF has achieved a tremendous online presence with links, banners, article postings, and online FAQs gracing the pages of expatriate websites around the world. Domestic voter sites including the Project Vote Smart, Smart Voter, and many local and state election offices offer links to RAVA and the EOD.

The university student abroad programs are seeing the benefit of listing voter registration services for their participants.—Harvard , Tufts, Princeton, Wesleyan College, University of Iowa, University of Michigan, University of Pittsburgh, University of California –Berkeley, Stanford, Northwestern, University of Wisconsin, University of Nevada.

OVF is currently working with the American Democracy Project (ADP), and the National Campus Voter Registration Project (NCVRP) to further our outreach in the student abroad youth voting arena.

## **Voter Trust**

Building the trust of voters is no small feat. It happens bit by bit – by helping them. Trust indicators for OVF include:

- usage of our services
- joining and staying on our membership list
- sending us donations
- answering our surveys
- volunteered feedback

One great challenge is that, based on our research, over 50% of UOCAVA voters do not believe that their votes are counted.

## **Enabling Other Organizations to Register UOCAVA Voters**

States and other organizations can also license the OVF suite of voter services. The “VOTERTOOLS” licensing option allows other organizations to take advantage of the already developed and proven software that runs on the OVF site with their own look and feel. This allows any organization to implement a complete UOCAVA voter solution, *branded as their own*, without any development cost overhead while garnering the full power of the services and their sophisticated design. Licensing options were launched in July 2006.



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## **Summary Statement**

In summary, I have made an effort in this presentation to elucidate the value aspects of our voter services. The unique combination of the interactive services we offer and how they are offered distinguishes our organization and supports our mission to facilitate UOCAVA voter participation in federal elections. This is a long-term effort. OVF has a future vision which we hope to go on to achieve. For this we will need support in many forms.

This is Overseas Vote Foundation's first election year. We have delivered on our promises and established a track record of merit. We are thankful for the tremendous support from the election community and look forward to continuing to advance our mission through 2008 and beyond.

**As we Americans are working to take democracy  
to other parts of the world, let's also  
take democracy to Americans  
*throughout* the world.**

**Showing an example is the best way  
to make democracy work.**



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