



# CHIEF's Sight Picture

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## The Importance of Voting -- The Power of Your Vote

Around the world, the Airmen of our United States Air Force make a difference. From the collapse of the Soviet Union and Desert Storm more than a decade ago to our global planning and execution of air and space power today, Airmen have done more than their part for our nation. In the coming months, we need to make a difference in another way. We all need to exercise the privilege only enjoyed by free nations -- the privilege of voting.

Most of you have been deployed in an Air Expeditionary Force since you have been in the Air Force. You have seen our way of life compared to others in troubled parts of the world. While we as Americans are not without our problems and issues, if all the borders of all the nations of the world were open to all people, where do you think most would choose to reside? There is little doubt that it would be in the Land of the Free.

There have been many books written in recent years about our founding fathers -- the men who wrote the powerful words that forged a new nation. In our Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson penned a phrase that is the cornerstone of our democratic institutions and makes us unique among nations. He wrote, ...*"Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just power from the consent of the governed."* It is this idea of the "Consent of the Governed" that empowers each of us in the form of our vote.

Many of us have experienced some obstacles to voting while serving in the armed forces. The absentee voting system has traditionally been fraught with challenges, but we have been working hard to minimize the red tape. With Airmen and their families serving around the globe, many suffer from delays in mail service -- another obstacle to registering and voting. Our leadership in the Department of Defense has worked with the U.S. Postal Service to give priority to voting materials in the mail system. To facilitate the voting process, we have also created a user-friendly voting link called "Airmen Votes" on our Air Force Link website for you and your families to use. The "[Airmen Votes](#)" icon on the Air Force Link website, [www.af.mil](http://www.af.mil), will guide you to all the information you need to register to vote, file an absentee ballot request, and send in an absentee ballot. In most cases, all you need to do is fill out a postcard and mail it in. Guidance is available for all states and territories and for those Airmen living overseas. Your family members who are eligible to vote can use this web link as well, including children away from home while attending school. If you still have questions, contact your Voting Assistance Officers -- they are available to address your voting questions or

concerns. We want to make voting as easy as possible.

The Secretary of the Air Force, Dr. Jim Roche, and I are dedicated to ensuring every eligible Airman has the opportunity to vote. As Airmen we have all taken an oath to support and defend the Constitution that guarantees our right to vote. As a nation we accept divergence of opinion and candidates with different views. I encourage you to avail yourself of the right to vote for candidates and on the issues of your choice. No other single act is so fundamental to our form of Government. Please register. Please vote.

I urge you to exercise your right to vote. If there was any doubt that every vote counts, past presidential elections have proved that it does! Just a few votes can decide the outcome of an election. As we pave the way for democratic governments in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is only fitting that we provide an example of democracy in action by engaging in the democratic process at home. We protect democracy through our military duty and service to our country, but we also protect democracy when we vote. Democracy only works when people fulfill their obligation to cast their ballot.

This year, Americans will have the opportunity once again to exercise that right by going to the polls to vote for the President and Vice President, members of Congress, as well as thousands of local officials. Even if you are stationed far from your home of record, you can vote through the absentee ballot process. This is true whether you are stationed one state away or deployed to another country.

The absentee voting process is not without problems, but we are working to minimize them. As a result of America's global posture, many of our Airmen deployed in combat environments and other locations do not receive timely mail services. The Department of Defense has coordinated efforts with the U.S. Postal Service in order to better serve these members and their voting needs.

Secretary Roche and I are dedicated to ensuring every eligible Airman has the opportunity to vote. Historically, Airmen lead the public at large in exercising this fundamental right and duty of citizenship. We'd like to see this trend continue. To this end, voter assistance officers reside within each of your units who are responsible for answering your questions about elections and facilitating the voting process.

Voting is now easier than it has ever been before. If you'd like to register to vote or get information on voting procedures then access <http://www.fvap.gov>. This webpage provides simple instructions on what to do. In most cases, all you need to do is fill out a post card and mail it in. Guidance is available for all states and for those Airmen living overseas. Furthermore, contact your voting assistance officers -- these people are available to address your voting questions or concerns.

We all have an important voice that should be heard and heeded by our government. When we go to the polls, we can express our views through the democratic process. As members of the world's greatest Air Force, we labor so that others may vote; let's make

sure we exercise that same right. See you at the polls!



*John G. Thompson*  
AIR FORCE  
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