

Testimony for Vote Vets, Garrett Reppenhagen, US Army OIF Veteran 1/14/2016

Thanks to the Secretary's office for hearing comments

I am here today to comment on Rule 7.2.6. As someone who served in the military, I have experienced how difficult it can be to cast a ballot while serving our great country.

I have been deployed to Iraq and Kosovo, working 24 hour staff duty, and in the field training for 24 days during various elections. There are numerous occasions when service members find it difficult to get to the ballot box. As a sniper in the US Army, I assure you it is one of the last things you need to worry about.

Colorado recognizes that there are many circumstances where a voter may not be able to turn in their own ballot in person or vote in person – whether because of their job, disabilities or personal circumstances. Veterans in particular may have a combination of all of these factors.

Colorado's law allows someone to collect up to 10 ballots to turn into clerk's offices to be counted. Last summer, the Secretary issued a rule that would require voters who are giving their ballot to someone else to deliver to write the name of the person on the envelope. Today, the Secretary is issuing a rule saying that vote should count regardless of whether the name is recorded on the envelope.

While I am pleased that the Secretary recognizes that all properly cast ballots should be counted, I am confused as to why we need either the first rule or this one. Today's rule would render the first rule toothless and meaningless. Why make a government regulation and then say that even if you don't do it, it doesn't matter?

Requiring an additional step for active military or veterans to cast a ballot is a needless and ineffective government requirement. What if they fill in any name they want – Mickey Mouse? Will the county clerks actually check and create a database of whose name is on the envelope? Where would that database be kept?

Often, disabled vets depend on others to assist in many ways, including helping them deliver their ballots. Those friends or volunteers may not want their name and address on the envelope. I think we all agree that it's critical that we offer our military and veterans the maximum opportunity to vote in exchange for their service, and not place any obstacles in their way to the ballot box.

I would ask that the Secretary reconsider the initial rule and the rule we are testifying on today because at best they are unnecessary and ineffective – and at worst, creates an extra step that could create a chilling effect on active military and disabled veterans casting their votes.