



Capitol Contact by State Representative Steve Simon

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A Victory for Minnesota's Military and Overseas Voters

Dear Friends,

I just passed legislation to protect the rights of Minnesota's overseas voters by moving our state primary election from mid-September to mid-August. The change will allow thousands of Minnesotans living overseas (military personnel, students, diplomats, and others) to mail their absentee ballots back in time to be counted on Election Day. After working on this issue for three years, I was happy to see my bill pass by a bi-partisan vote of 126-5.

Steve

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THE PROBLEM:

Our Late Primary Election Unfairly Penalizes Our Voters Living Overseas

The date of Minnesota's primary election contest in mid-September is the second latest in the country. Many states start as early as March, while we in Minnesota wait until September. The period between the primary election and the November general election is only eight weeks. That's a problem because Minnesotans overseas often don't receive their absentee ballots in time to mail them back by Election Day. As a result, thousands of overseas absentee ballots are discarded each year because they arrive too late to be counted. A large proportion of those discarded ballots are from men and women in our armed forces.

THE URGENCY:

New Rules from the Federal Government

Last fall, the federal government enacted a law requiring states to provide a 45-day absentee ballot period before every election. States who decline will face a penalty—or court action. Minnesota's current absentee ballot period is far shorter than 45 days, so we had to move Minnesota's September primary to an earlier date.

THE SOLUTION:

Move the Primary Election to August

For years legislators disagreed about whether or when to move the state's primary election date. Some wanted to keep the primary in September, while others favored a date as early as June. My idea was to compromise on an August primary. And, thanks to support for my legislation from both Democrats and Republicans, that is now the law. For all Minnesotans, the primary election in 2010 will be August 10th instead of September 14th. More importantly, thousands of Minnesotans living overseas can be more confident that their votes will be counted on Election Day.

As always, please feel free to contact me about any issue, idea, or concern.