

The Congressional Front.  
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THEY CAN STILL VOTE

Whatever comes out of the 3-way controversy between the House, the Senate, and the President on the pending bills to provide votes for soldiers, the men and women in the armed forces will still be able to vote. Somewhat forgotten in the heated discussion was the fact that in the summer of 1942, Congress passed and the President signed a bill to make it possible for men and women in the services who are absent from their states on military duty to vote. That is the law today.

IT'S PROVISIONS

That bill was passed Congress in July of 1942, by a 4 to 1 vote and the only real controversy at that time arose over a provision which prohibited certain states in the south making the payment of poll taxes a condition or qualification for voting. There are still 7 states which require a poll tax payment before an otherwise qualified person can vote but the Federal law of 1942 virtually nullified that provision insofar as it might apply to a vote for President, Senator or Congressman. In general, the law now provides for making a post-card application for a ballot and for an official war ballot to be supplied by the Secretaries of State of the various states. Interesting as a footnote to all of this is the fact that when this legislation was being considered nearly two years ago, the Secretaries of State from over the nation were holding their annual convention in Baltimore Maryland and by resolution approved the measure then pending in Congress. The 1942 law was therefore in effect at the time of the November elections in 1942. It is a fact however that but a small number of men in service voted. It has been frequently alleged that the War and Navy Departments did not cooperate at that time to bring about a larger vote. The fact is that it was small and it was that fact also that brought about the controversy that raged in Congress over this issue for many weeks.

WHAT'S THE SHOOTING ABOUT

1944 is a Presidential election year. Obviously the 5,000,000 men and women who are expected to be overseas by November constitutes not only a large block of votes but can in fact determine the outcome of the election. Three facts should be remembered about all this. The first is that despite the polls which have been taken, nobody knows how the soldiers and sailors will vote in November. The second is that there has frankly been no little selfishness on both political sides of the fence. The third is that everybody wants the man in service to have an opportunity to vote. When it came to the question of how it should be handled, the conflict began.

THE ISSUE

There are those who felt that it was up to the Federal Government to do it. They contended that it was constitutional for Congress to make special provision for a soldier vote and that the task of getting the ballots over and back in time for November was the big job. This would have to be done by the Army and Navy by means of military planes. Out of these contentions there came the Bill to create a Federal Ballot Commission which would supervise balloting by soldiers by means of a very simple and brief ballot on which the soldier could merely write down the name of the political party for which he wished to vote. That is how the proposed ballot came to be called the "bobtailed ballot". Others on the other hand contended that under the Constitution, it was entirely in the hands of the states as to how, when, and where a person who was absent on military duty could vote and that Congress had no authority to do anything about it other than to recommend to the states that they take all necessary action to facilitate and expedite soldier voting. The Federal view crystallized in the form of the Green-Lucas Bill while the State view was set forth in the so-called Rankin Bill. These two views clashed on the floor of Congress for three days. It was finally disposed in the House about eleven o'clock at night of the third day when the State view prevailed, and the Rankin Bill was passed.

CONFERENCE

When the Senate completes action on the bill before it, members of the House and Senate will then sit down around the table and try to thresh out their differences. If they fail to do so and no new legislation results, the men and women in service can still vote under the act of 1942 and it behooves the officials of all states to make every endeavor to see that the folks in uniform are provided with ballots.