

THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT
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THE SOLDIER VOTE BILL.

At long last, Congress completed action on the bill to facilitate voting in time of war by members of the armed forces. It was a long-drawn and heated item of controversy. It involved the old and yet ever-fresh issue of States Rights. It involved the issue of centralized power in the Federal Government. The resulting measure was a compromise and we set out as briefly and simply as possible, its essential provisions.

USE OF STATE BALLOTS.

(1) The bill recommends action by the states to permit members of the armed services to vote by absentee ballot. (2) It recommends that where possible, the requirement that an application for a ballot be made, may be waived (3) It provides that the United States War Ballot Commission provide post-cards on which application for a ballot may be made to the proper state officials (4) The Ballot Commission shall provide the Secretaries of War and Navy and the War Shipping Administration with all necessary information regarding elections to be transmitted to those in the services (5) The Secretaries of War and Navy and the WSA Administrator shall cooperate with state officials in the transmission and return of the ballots. (6) It recommends that states modify their election laws where the absentee ballot to be mailed to soldier voters is not available at least 45 days before the election (7) It is recommended that states reduce size and weight of their ballots as much as possible to make transmission by plane easier.

THE SUPPLEMENTARY FEDERAL BALLOT.

While encouraging the state legislature to take action to facilitate voting by those in the armed services, the bill recognizes that because of certain constitutional difficulties, the absentee voters in some states may be precluded from voting and therefore makes provision for a supplementary federal ballot which can be used under certain conditions. To assist in the preparation and distribution of such a federal ballot, a War Ballot Commission is created consisting of the Secretaries of War and Navy and the Administrator of the War Shipping Administration. This Commission may receive assistance from other Federal agencies and shall consult with and cooperate with State officials.

TO WHOM AVAILABLE AND HOW.

The Federal ballot shall be available to citizens of those states whose Governors certify before July 15th that such state has no provision for absentee voting and that a Federal ballot is authorized by the laws of the state. (This would apply to absentee voters both in and out of the country) It shall be available also to those citizens from states whose Governors have certified that a Federal ballot is authorized by the laws of the state, even though such Governor has not certified that the state has no machinery for absentee voting, providing the citizen under oath states that he made application for a ballot before Sept. 1st but had not received such ballot by October 1st.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS.

(1) The bill sets forth the type of federal ballot to be used, the oath which the soldier-voter must take, the outer and inner envelopes to be used, the printing and transmission of election instructions etc. (2) Officers and non-commissioned officers with the rank of sergeant or above may administer the oath. (3) An adequate supply of federal ballots

shall be prepared and made available well in advance of the election. (4) Lists of candidates shall be prepared and furnished to those in the services in ample time ~~time~~ before the election. (5) Commanding officers shall so far as possible, post lists of candidates and instructions in a conspicuous place, give every service man an opportunity to mark his ballot in secret and destroy the ballots which have not been used. (6) It is made unlawful for any officer or non-commissioned officer to attempt to influence a soldier how to vote but this shall not be construed to prohibit free political discussion. (7) Convenient places shall be provided in which to mark the ballots. (8) Voting safeguards are provided. (9) The necessary funds are authorized to carry the Act into effect. (10) The Secretaries of War, Navy and the Shipping Administrator shall make full reports of the number of ballots distributed and returned. (11) The validity of the ballot shall be determined under state laws. (12) The taking of political polls in the armed services is prohibited. (13) The use of unwarranted political propaganda is prohibited. (14) And it is made unlawful for any censor to remove political literature from any letter that might be addressed to a member of the armed services.

WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE.

When all is said and done, the whole controversy boils down to this. If state laws provide for absentee voting, a regular state ballot containing the names of all candidates for local, state and federal office shall be provided to the soldier in ample time for its return before election day so that it may be properly counted under state law. Where this is impossible because of inhibitions or difficulties in state laws, the federal ballot shall under certain conditions then be made available so that the absentee soldier, sailor, Marine, USO worker, Wac, Wave, Spar, Red Cross worker, woman pilot or worker with the Society of Friends or a member of the Merchant Marine outside of the United States can then vote for President, Vice President, Senator and Representative in Congress. It appears that every person in the armed services or the auxiliary service can vote if so disposed under this combination ballot program.