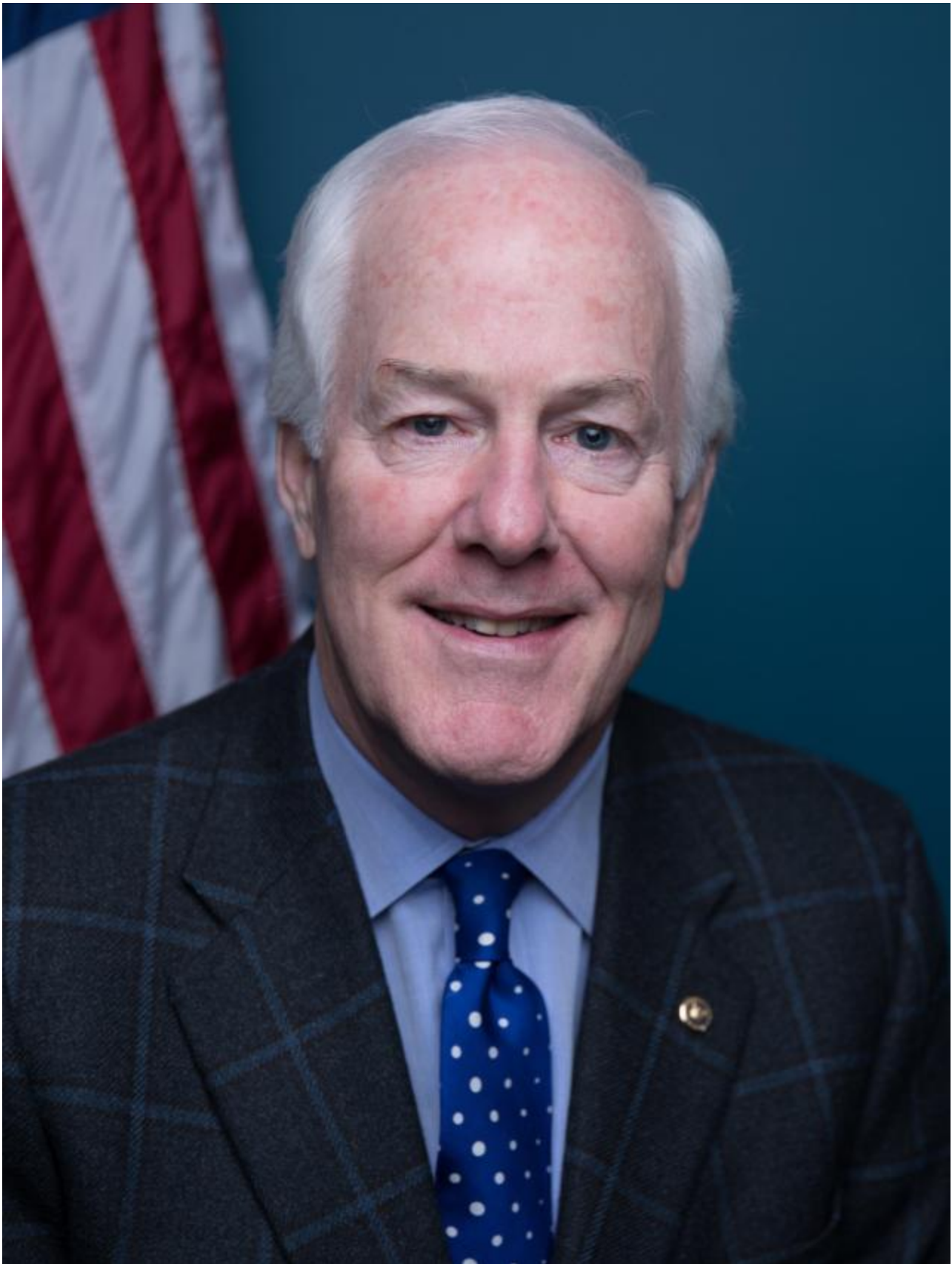




# **Duckworth, Cornyn Introduce Bipartisan Bill To Increase Voting Access For Military Voters**

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*Military voters have voted at a 15 percent lower rate than the general population since 2014*

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Combat Veteran and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and U.S. Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) today introduced bipartisan legislation that would make it easier for our servicemembers to vote. The *Reducing Barriers for Military*

*Voters Act* would establish a secure electronic voting system for active duty servicemembers stationed in hazardous duty zones or rotational deployments. U.S. Representatives Andy Kim (D-NJ-03) and Joe Wilson (R-SC-02) introduced companion legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives earlier this year.

“Servicemembers face numerous barriers to voting that make it more difficult for them to more fully participate in our democracy by exercising their right to vote,” Duckworth said. “We should be doing everything we can to strengthen voting rights across the country, which is why I’m introducing this bipartisan bill with Senator Cornyn that would increase access to the ballot box for our troops.”

"It's a sad fact that servicemembers in faraway or isolated posts sometimes can't participate in the very same democratic system they are fighting for," said Cornyn. "This legislation will allow active-duty troops deployed to some of our most difficult assignments to safely and securely cast their ballots, and I'm proud to join Sen. Duckworth in introducing this important piece of bipartisan and bicameral legislation."

Specifically, the *Reducing Barriers for Military Voters Act* would:

- **Establish an end-to-end electronic voting system for active duty servicemembers** stationed in hazardous duty zones or rotational deployments by amending the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA).
  - The system will require a verifiable, audit-able vote trail (paper or electronic).
- **Require DoD’s Chief Information Officer to develop a secure plan** including services for registering to vote, requesting an electronic ballot, completing the ballot and returning the ballot.
- **Provide DOD with maximum flexibility** in determining the best means for implementation and ensure a population subset assessment before full implementation to identify and fix any potential problems.
  - The legislation would direct DOD to test the service with a subset of voters in the 2024 federal election and expand it to the entire identified population for the 2026 federal election cycle.
- **Grant states the ability to “opt-in”** to ensure the proper and necessary coordination with state election officials.

Military voters have participated well below the rate of the general population in every election since 2010. Despite exemplary outreach by the Department of Defense’s (DoD) Federal Voting Assistance Project (FVAP), voting rules for active duty servicemembers depend on individual state policies. Given the frequency of operational deployments and inconsistent mail service to remote outposts, state-by-state changes to election laws create obstacles that disproportionately impact military turnout. A comprehensive report in 2016 by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission found that ballots cast by military

and overseas citizens have a three times higher rate of rejection. Of those rejected ballots, 44.4 percent were not counted because the vote was not received on time.

24 states currently utilize electronic ballot returns for select populations, and this bill would provide states an additional tool to enfranchise military voters serving in remote areas. Similar bills expanding access to military voters are currently working their way through state legislatures on a bipartisan basis. This legislation builds on established practices in a way that would incorporate DoD cybersecurity expertise and oversight.

This legislation is endorsed by MOAA, Blue Star Families, Secure Families Initiative, Mobile Voting Project, National Military Family Association, Partners in Promise and the Service Women's Action Network.