

Murphy to Announce Legislation to Allow Nonpartisan Voter Registration at VA Facilities

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CHESHIRE, CT - Today, Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) announced that he is introducing legislation, the Veteran Voting Support Act, to require the Secretary of Veteran Affairs (VA) to allow nonpartisan organizations to provide voter registration information and assistance at VA facilities. Murphy was joined at a press conference in Cheshire to announce this legislation with Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz, Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, veterans' organizations, and voting rights organizations.

"Veterans have done so much for our country, it's only right that we do all we can to assist them in exercising their constitutional right to vote. It's unfortunate that we need a federal law, but if that's what it takes to guarantee the right to vote, then Congress is prepared to act," said Murphy.

The Department of Veterans Affairs recently adopted a voting assistance policy that has been heavily criticized for not permitting voter registration drives. Nonpartisan voter registration drives are one of the most effective tools to ensure veterans are given the opportunity to vote. Across the country millions of voters are energized by these registration efforts, yet the VA is currently denying veterans this same opportunity.

The legislation also addresses the need to help disabled veterans living in VA facilities with requesting an absentee ballot and assisting in completing the ballot. By not allowing nonpartisan organizations to assist these individuals, many of them may not be able to vote at all.

Murphy will be returning to Washington Tuesday

afternoon to push for quick action on the Veteran Voting Support Act so that those who have provided extraordinary service to our democracy will be able to fully participate in it.

"I commend Congressman Murphy's thoughtful yet simple legislation. The VA's policy is a slap in the face to our courageous veterans who have sacrificed so much to preserve our fundamental right to vote. We have less than 100 days until the most important election of our time, and our veterans have every right to participate. Registering our veterans to vote is not partisan political activity, and it is not disruptive to their health care. It is simply helping our wounded warriors exercise their constitutional and civil rights," said Secretary Bysiewicz.

Attorney General Richard Blumenthal said, "This legislation would be highly significant and perhaps spare a court battle -- to assure access for veterans to voting registration and education rights. The VA's refusal to permit nonpartisan voter registration drives and voting machine demonstrations is blatantly illegal -- mocking clear constitutional rights, and disrespecting our veterans. Instead of clear straight answers, the VA has given us disingenuous doubletalk and bureaucratic gobbledeygook -- designed to discourage and delay voter registration.

Blumenthal concluded: "We have made a final demand to the VA: allow legally required non-partisan voter registration drives, including both inpatients and outpatients, staff and visitors; permit voter education and demonstration of the new machines; lift unreasonable and restrictive restraints on access. If these demands are unmet by August 1, we will take appropriate action to fight for these veterans rights -- just as they fought for ours -- including potential action in court."

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