

## **Military ballot process at issue Schumer holds hearing on expanding service members' voting options**

By LEIGH HORNBECK, Staff writer  
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ALBANY — Mathew Tully, a major in the Army National Guard, was unable to vote in the presidential election last fall for the first time since he turned 18. He was on military duty in Washington, D.C., and the Schenectady County Board of Elections didn't process his absentee ballot request fast enough for him to vote.

Tully, 35, is not alone among military personnel who often miss their chance to vote, according to a report by the Pew Research Center. The center labeled New York a "no time to vote state," meaning boards of elections do not mail absentee ballots in time for absentee personnel to vote on time.

In the Capital Region last year, local boards of elections sent 2,613 absentee ballots to servicemen and woman serving overseas. Only 53 percent were counted. Some were filled out incorrectly, but for the most part the ballots didn't make it back in time to be counted.

The issue surfaced during the special election in the 20th Congressional District in March, when the state Board of Elections extended the deadline for military ballots after the U.S. Department of Defense sued on behalf of military personnel. But no permanent remedy was put in place to make it easier for military voters to cast ballots.

The problem, Tully said, is the multi-step process. Soldiers must write to their local elections officials and ask for an absentee ballot, then wait for the ballot to arrive through the U.S. Postal Service and the military postal service, fill it out properly and return it, again through the mail. The process can take 82 days, the Pew Center found — 72 days of transit time, three days with the military voter, seven days to be processed back in New York.

Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., has taken up the cause and presided over a hearing on the issue Wednesday in Washington, D.C.

"It is deplorable in this age of global communication our military men and women cannot cast ballots at home," Schumer said during a conference call.

Schumer is working on legislation to make it easier for military personnel to vote. Officials are considering an online option, longer time periods to both apply and return

ballots by mail and installing voting kiosks on overseas military bases closer to where soldiers are serving in the field.

Paul Lindsay, a spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee, criticized Schumer's timing Wednesday.

"Chuck Schumer has taken on an important issue, but it's unfortunate that both he and Scott Murphy failed to voice their opinions when it mattered most during the recent special election, Lindsay said. " Military men and women in New York who were potentially disenfranchised deserved more than the silence and inaction they received during the election process."