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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOCKS OVERSEAS AMERICANS FROM ONLINE ABSENTEE BALLOT APPLICATIONS

Reps. Waxman, Maloney, and Clay urge Sec. Rumsfeld to reverse policy that disenfranchises Americans living abroad

WASHINGTON, DC – Americans living overseas may be shut out of voting in the coming elections. The Pentagon is blocking access to the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) website for internet service providers in 25 countries, claiming that it needs to protect this website from hackers. Americans in countries including Great Britain, France, Spain, and Japan are unable to access this site, violating the program's mission to help Americans overseas vote.

Rep. Henry A. Waxman, Ranking Member of the House Government Reform Committee, Rep. Carolyn Maloney, and Rep. Wm. Lacy Clay sent a letter today to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld urging him to immediately reverse this policy that could potentially disenfranchise millions of Americans overseas. Reps. Waxman, Maloney, and Clay maintain that other safeguards to keep hackers out of the FVAP system can be installed without denying a large number of Americans access to their website and, hence, access to a ballot.

“Without access to this website, overseas Americans will have difficulty requesting absentee ballots and gaining information about the election,” said Rep. Waxman. “Protection from hackers should not come at this high a price. The Department of Defense should restore full access to this website immediately.”

“We've sent a man to the moon, so we should also be able to safeguard our voter assistance websites without disenfranchising patriotic, tax-paying, law-abiding Americans,” said Rep. Maloney. “Our government should make it as easy as possible for all Americans to exercise their most basic right, rather than making them navigate an obstacle course just to apply for a ballot.

“Unfortunately, this episode follows in a line of actions that make one question the Pentagon's commitment to helping overseas Americans vote. First, they didn't print

enough absentee ballot applications, then they planned to use overseas Americans as guinea pigs for internet voting, and now this. American citizens deserve to be treated as American citizens, no matter if they live in Kansas or are serving their country overseas.”

“This website is a valuable resource that provides U.S. citizens abroad with a wide range of non-partisan information to encourage their participation in the democratic process,” said Rep. Clay. “The Department of Defense must utilize the security solutions they already have in place, such as distributed computing, to safely allow global access to this site.”

Earlier this year, the overseas arms of the Republican and Democratic parties criticized the Pentagon for not making applications for absentee ballots overseas as easily available as usual. Under criticism, the Pentagon was also forced to change a plan that would have allowed internet voting – a method yet to be proven reliable – for overseas Americans.

The letter is available at www.democrats.reform.house.gov.

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