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COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
FACSIMILE (202) 225-3974
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
TTY (202) 225-6852

www.house.gov/reform

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Contact: Karen Lightfoot/ Anna Laitin (Waxman)
(202) 225-5051
Afshin Mohamadi (Maloney)
(202) 225-7944

HAVE WE DONE EVERYTHING WE CAN TO HELP AMERICANS OVERSEAS TO VOTE?

MEMBERS SEEK INVESTIGATION TO ENSURE FAIR VOTING RIGHTS FOR THOSE LIVING ABROAD

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, Rep. Henry A. Waxman and Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to investigate whether the Department of Defense is fulfilling its obligation to help Americans living overseas cast absentee ballots in the upcoming election.

Under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), DOD is responsible for ensuring that civilian and military Americans abroad have the opportunity to vote. DOD's recent efforts in this area have been marked by inconsistency, lack of transparency, and inadequate communication with the public.

Reps. Waxman and Maloney point to several examples of such actions by DOD, including:

- Attempting to implement an internet registration and voting project that had fundamental computer and network security problems;
- Failing to maintain adequate supplies of absentee ballot request forms;
- Establishing e-mail and fax balloting systems in partnership with a private contractor that has questionable experience;
- Blocking access to a federal government website on which Americans abroad can request absentee ballots; and
- Launching an internet absentee ballot access project just weeks before the 2004 election that is not accessible to all Americans living overseas.

In light of the Department's actions, Reps. Waxman and Maloney ask GAO to initiate an investigation "to help ensure that all Americans living abroad, both military and civilian, can participate in our democratic process with a degree of confidence that their vote will indeed be counted."

“The Defense Department’s failure to improve the process for overseas voters has put us on track to repeat many of the problems these voters faced four years ago,” said Rep. Waxman. “We need a full investigation to understand what has gone wrong and why.”

“The number of Defense Department missteps in this effort to improve voter access overseas makes me wonder if the Department is really doing all it can to help potential voters,” said Rep. Maloney. “What the Defense Department has done seems to have left large gaps in access to ballots for both military and non-military voters. We hope the GAO can help us understand why so many people were excluded from participation in the Defense Department’s new voting method, why a private contractor is accepting faxed votes and unsealed votes from overseas Americans, and who is monitoring the process.”

The full letter from Reps. Waxman and Maloney to GAO requesting an investigation is available at www.democrats.reform.house.gov.