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- PRESS RELEASE -

BYSIEWICZ ENDORSES FEDERAL LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE BALLOT ACCESS FOR MILITARY AND OVERSEAS VOTERS

SECRETARY OF THE STATE SUPPORTS PROVISION TO DRAMATICALLY REDUCE
MAIL DELAYS FOR TRANSFER OF VOTER REGISTRATION AND ABSENTEE
BALLOT MATERIALS

HARTFORD: Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz today announced her endorsement of the Overseas Voting Practical Amendments Act of 2009 [H.R. 1739] sponsored by U.S. Representatives Carolyn Maloney (D14-New York) and Michael Honda (D15-California) which would drastically increase ease of voting for overseas citizens and members of the armed forces. Among other things, the federal legislation would require all states to make voter registration forms, applications for absentee ballots, and absentee ballots available electronically either through fax or internet. The bill would not enable electronic voting. Connecticut currently provides voter registration cards and applications for absentee ballots online. Secretary Bysiewicz proposed a bill in the 2009 Connecticut General Assembly legislative session that would have made similar improvements to state law, including allowing towns to provide Absentee ballots to voters electronically.

“As the top election official for Connecticut, I am committed to doing everything I can to streamline the voting process for our citizens living overseas, especially those brave men and women serving us in uniform,” said Secretary Bysiewicz. “There are too many unacceptable delays in the transfer of voter registration and absentee ballot materials that

have the practical impact of preventing our military and overseas citizens from casting ballots in time for the election. This legislation will ensure that all American military personnel and citizens abroad will have ample time to vote and an efficient, effective way to participate in our electoral process. I applaud the efforts of Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, Congressman Michael Honda and other sponsors to lead at the federal level.”

H.R. 1739 would amend the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Voting Act of 1975 to allow overseas voters to automatically request absentee ballots, eliminate unnecessary technical restraints on the acceptance of absentee ballots, and create a competitive grant program for nonpartisan organizations to educate overseas voters. The 1975 bill has often failed to effectively guarantee the right to vote for military personnel and U.S. citizens living overseas.

The Overseas Voting Practical Amendments Act of 2009 would:

- Create a \$10 million competitive grant for nonpartisan organizations to significantly expand outreach and education for overseas voters;
- Prohibit states from refusing to accept balloting materials because they are generated by a computer program, are not printed on a specific type of paper, or do not otherwise meet similar extraneous requirements that aren't necessary to prevent election fraud;
- Give military and overseas voters more time to correct registration issues prior to Election Day;
- Allow overseas voters to request to automatically receive absentee ballots;
- Permit American citizens born overseas who have never lived in the United States to register and vote in elections.
- Ensure that states provide correct information and sufficient postage on pre-addressed materials to prevent overseas mail from going astray;
- Allow the State Department to help transmit ballots to Americans living in places with inadequate mail service;
- Synchronize the implementation of the Uniformed Overseas Citizens Voting Act across all states and territories.
- Provide for the mailing of absentee ballots and voter registration materials via diplomatic pouch

In a letter to Congressman Robert Brady(D1-PA), Chairman of the House Administration Committee, Secretary Bysiewicz endorsed the federal legislation by writing that it “...would go a long way toward improving access to the ballot for our military and overseas voters by taking advantage of technological developments, providing greater clarity of procedures for voters and election officials and ensuring consistency among the states. I view H.R. 1739 as a practical next step in providing needed clarification and an update of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, a next step that will greatly enhance the access of our military and overseas citizens to the ballot without undue burden or cost to states.”

The Overseas Voting Practical Amendments Act of 2009 is currently in front of the House Administration Committee and may come up for a committee vote before Congress takes its August recess.