

Press Release

January 26, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Holly Jacobson, Executive Director, Voter Action, (206) 723-1941
Pam Smith, President, Verified Voting, (760) 613-0172

Coalition Supports Improvements for Troop Voting; Rejects Risky Internet Ballot Proposals

OLYMPIA: Voting rights groups Voter Action, Common Cause, FUSE Washington and Verified Voting joined security experts today to support Washington's desire to improve voting opportunities for military and overseas voters. However, all warned that the proposed voting technologies for returning voted ballots via online electronic transmission are fundamentally insecure and do not fully respect the rights of voters deployed overseas to a private and secure ballot.

"It's critical that we ensure our brave men and women serving overseas have adequate time to vote in a trustworthy manner," said Holly Jacobson, Executive Director of Voter Action, a national election integrity organization based in Seattle. "In spite of good intentions, pending WA State legislation will NOT provide a trustworthy mechanism for these voters, as the recent internet based attacks of the Google corporate infrastructure and other major corporations dramatically illustrates. Indeed, it is no less than a matter of national security."

Pending bills HB 2483 and its companion SB 6238, allowing for a ballot to be returned by inherently insecure email and fax, and HB 1624 and its companion SB 5522, permitting internet voting without providing adequate security and privacy, are being pursued seemingly to meet the requirements of the 2009 federal Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act (MOVE). The Act requires the provision of voter registration applications, absentee ballot applications and transmittal of blank absentee ballots by mail and electronically. However, MOVE specifically *avoids* calling for the electronic return of voted ballots. According to the GAO: "...[Internet and email voting are]more vulnerable to privacy and security compromises than conventional methods now in use...[and]...available safeguards may not adequately reduce the risks of compromise."

"There's a clear distinction between using electronic means for outgoing ballots and information, which we strongly support, and using it to receive incoming voted ballots," said Pamela Smith, President of Verified Voting, a national organization researching election reliability issues. "Because secrecy and security simply cannot be assured, transmitting voted ballots electronically would dishonor the very men and women serving to protect us. Fortunately, there are better alternatives."

Dr. Barbara Simons, a computer scientist and member of the Board of Advisors of the U.S. Elections Assistance Commission, expressed concern about the proposed legislation. "We must ensure that we have established strong cybersecurity criteria before we experiment with transmitting voted ballots through cyberspace. The reality is that any system using current technology that allows voted ballots to be returned over the internet, *including via email*, can be hacked by other countries, as well as by criminals and political operatives."

To date, Washington State has one of the strongest voting systems in the country for military and overseas voters with 76% participation and over 99% of the ballots successfully counted. We encourage legislators to continue moving this legacy forward by increasing accessibility, while maintaining security.

Military and overseas voters should be offered the same reverence and assurances as those who are voting within the country. We urge legislators to modify HB 2483 and SB 6238 to pass those provisions expediting the sending of blank ballots and reject the provisions allowing for electronically transmitted voted ballots. We further urge lawmakers to reject HB 1624 and SB 5522.

-#-