

However, the underlying bill would arbitrarily limit eligibility to 10 urban areas total.

This would eliminate the Oxnard's ability to access the funds necessary to prevent and prepare for all types of hazards.

Mr. Chair, the Oxnard metropolitan area has just as much need to protect its citizens from terrorist threats as any other large city in the U.S.

For example, Oxnard is home to Naval Base Ventura County. This strategic military installation supports ongoing military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as important D.O.D. weapons testing programs.

The Port of Hueneme—the only deepwater harbor between Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area—serves international businesses and ocean carriers from the Pacific Rim and Europe.

The Oxnard coastline is dotted with offshore oil and gas platforms, power plants and chemical facilities.

And Oxnard is located alongside U.S. Highway 101—the only north-south evacuation route on California's Central Coast.

That's why the Department of Homeland Security has granted millions of dollars to the Oxnard UASI over the years.

It's recognized the need to support this community's efforts to: train and equip first responders, improve interoperable communications, establish fusion centers, and protect critical infrastructure.

It knows it must enhance the capacity to respond to all-hazard events, including tsunamis, wildfires, mudslides or earthquakes.

And it understands that investing in local programs, like "Ventura Get Ready," will help ensure the safety and security of our citizens.

Mr. Chair, we all know this is a tough budget environment and that we need to make targeted investments.

But making more than 50 cities ineligible for UASI funds—regardless of threat and vulnerability levels—is shortsighted and wrong.

These communities contain numerous assets, resources and critical infrastructure that are vulnerable to attack and that are tremendously important to the nation.

Now is not the time to eliminate the eligibility of our threatened urban areas from UASI funding.

We cannot lay the entire financial burden of securing our cities on local authorities, first responders, and law enforcement and expect to adequately protect our citizens and make our cities safe.

Let's remove this harmful UASI language from the bill and ensure our cities have the necessary capabilities to safeguard our communities.

Vote "yes" on the bipartisan Clarke-Higgins amendment.

COMMEMORATING AZERBAIJAN'S
REPUBLIC DAY AND 20 YEARS
OF U.S.-AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS

HON. JOSEPH R. PITTS

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, last week we celebrated Azerbaijan's Republic Day, which commemorates the 93rd anniversary of Azerbaijan's independence from the Russian Em-

pire. Later this year, Azerbaijan will also celebrate the 20th anniversary of its freedom from the Soviet Union and the state of diplomatic relations with the United States.

The U.S.-Azerbaijan partnership is based on shared values and common goals. Over the last 20 years, Azerbaijan has become a key strategic ally of the United States and has helped the United States achieve important security and economic objectives in a complex part of the world.

Azerbaijan supports U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan, sending troops and civilian personnel to Afghanistan to serve alongside U.S. troops, as well as training civilian and security officers both in Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. Azerbaijan is also a key part of the Northern Distribution Network, which provides ground and naval transit for roughly 25 percent of the Coalition's supplies bound for Afghanistan.

Azerbaijan also plays an important role in strengthening U.S. and European energy independence and is currently expanding its commercial and economic ties with the United States. Azerbaijan, which provides roughly a quarter of Israel's oil, is a secular Muslim country that maintains close friendly ties with Israel.

Please join me in honoring Azerbaijan's 93rd Republic Day and celebrating a healthy U.S.-Azerbaijan relationship.

IN HONOR OF THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE AU PAIR IN AMERICA
PROGRAM

HON. JAMES A. HIMES

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Mr. HIMES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of the 25th anniversary of the Au Pair in America Program. Based in Stamford, Connecticut, the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) and its Au Pair in America Program have been leaders in providing young people with exceptional cultural exchange programs.

The Au Pair in America program began in 1986 with the goal of providing young people with unique cultural exchange opportunities. The first authorized sponsor for au pair programs, Au Pair in America has brought more than 87,000 au pairs from over 60 countries to live with an American family, care for children, and pursue educational interests for a year.

On June 9, 2011, the State Department will be hosting a reception in honor of the program's 25th anniversary. I congratulate AIFS and Au Pair in America on the continued success of this educational and cultural program, and extend my best wishes to all the program participants in their work to foster global exchange.

THE UNIVERSAL RIGHT TO VOTE
BY MAIL ACT OF 2011

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Universal Right to Vote

by Mail Act of 2011—a bill to allow any eligible voter to vote by mail in a federal election if he or she chooses to do so.

In my home state of California, voters already have this right. California is one of the twenty-nine states that, along with the District of Columbia, already provide this convenient alternative to voters.

While I love the ritual of going to the polls to vote, I know that getting to the polls on Election Day is often difficult. For some, it's impossible.

That is why I have introduced a bill that builds upon the growing trend of states to bring the polls to the voters. I believe we should try to meet our constituents halfway by increasing access to the electoral process.

What I am proposing is not new or even untested. States ranging from my home state of California, to Wisconsin, to North Carolina, to Maine have already adopted this voter-friendly policy.

With mail voting, citizens can vote from the convenience of their own homes. They will have more time to mull over their choices and make informed decisions, and they will be able to do so on their own terms.

Not surprisingly, studies have shown that some of the biggest supporters of voting by mail are parents, who must schedule time to go to the polls around so many other obligations.

Studies have also indicated that adding the option to vote by mail does not create a partisan advantage for one political party over the other.

Republicans and Democrats both benefit from similar increases in voter turnout when voters are given the choice to mail in their ballots.

In fact, overwhelming support for voting by mail is consistent across nearly every demographic—including age, income level, race, education, employment status and ideology. It is a win-win for all Americans.

After adopting a universal right to vote by mail system in 1978, California saw a thirty percent increase in the use of mail-in ballots.

Other states that have implemented this policy have seen the same degree of support from voters, which is why it is hardly surprising that States offering the option of mail-in ballots often experience greater voter participation.

There is also an extremely low incidence of fraud with voting by mail when compared to other methods of voting.

As the former President of the League of Women Voters of San Diego, I care deeply about the integrity of our electoral system.

Twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia have already proven this option works, and it is safe. It is time to give voters in the remaining states this convenient, secure and affordable alternative.

While I am proud to be from a state where citizens already have this right, I believe democracy works best when all citizens have an equal opportunity to have their voices heard.

Right now, an uneven playing field exists between states that already offer the option of mail-in ballots and states that do not.

When the same election is more accessible to voters in California than it is to voters in other states, the system is unfair.

States that fail to offer this choice stand to compromise their leverage in federal elections by curbing the greatest level of voter participation.