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The Hon. Daniel Lungren, Chairman
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Committee on House Administration
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

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Invest in Our Democracy – Election Assistance Commission Must be Fully Staffed and Funded

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The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (“EAC”) is designed to serve a critical role in ensuring the trustworthiness of our nation’s elections, even though it has been hampered by consistent shortfalls in funding and staff. It is long past time that Congress fulfills the pledge made in the Help America Vote Act (“HAVA”) to enhance citizen trust in our elections and provides the Election Assistance Commission with the resources necessary to fulfill its mandate. Public Citizen strongly encourages Congress to approve the 2012 budget request of the EAC and to oversee that all open positions on the Commission are filled and that the agency is properly staffed.

Following the ballot box fiasco of the 2000 presidential elections – during which the United States was unable to declare a president-elect, prompting Cuban president Fidel Castro facetious offer to send elections observers to Florida to help us out – Congress pledged swift action to help states upgrade long-neglected election systems and machinery. Two years later Congress approved HAVA for this purpose, which President Bush signed in October 2002.

The law established new standards for election equipment and voting requirements and set aside \$3.8 billion over four years to help states buy new equipment, create statewide voter registration databases, set minimum standards for provisional voting and make ballot boxes accessible to voters with disabilities. It also created the Election Assistance Commission to help states interpret the act, conduct studies, enforce the National Voter Registration Act, and certify and test election equipment standards.

With about 8,000 separate election authorities managing approximately 175,000 polling places and perhaps as many as 150,000 different ballot forms that include choices for everyone from senator to dogcatcher, American elections are complex even when all goes well. Unfortunately, the EAC has not received sufficient funding to fully realize its mission and the President and Congress have both acted in a lackluster fashion when it comes to ensuring that the Commission is staffed and fully operational.

Nevertheless, the EAC has performed invaluable work improving our election systems. It has played a major role in collecting accurate election data; training the leagues of state elections officers; developing uniform standards for voting equipment; and improving accessibility of voting for the nation's 37 million voters with disabilities.

Our nation is in need of strong leadership from the Election Assistance Commission to standardize and coordinate the world's most complex election system. It is imperative that Congress properly invest in our democracy and fund the EAC, and that Congress work with the President to make sure the Commission has a full complement of commissioners and staff.

The greatest democracy in the world should never have to find itself in the situation where its election outcomes are in doubt.