Exhibit H

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GOP registration challenge frustrates voters, officials

By JOHN S. ADAMS Tribune Capitol Bureau

HELENA — Army 1st Lt. Kevin Furey of Helena is furious.

That’s because Furey, a former Democratic state representative from Missoula, found out Friday that his right to vote was challenged by the Montana Republican Party.

Furey got the news just days before he will ship off to Kuwait and then Iraq for his second tour of duty. "It is ironic that at the same time I am about to return to Iraq to help build a democracy that my own right to vote is being challenged at home for partisan purposes. These challenges are a blatant and offensive attempt to suppress the rights of voters," Furey said in a telephone interview from Chicago, where he was on leave visiting his ailing grandmother.

Furey joins perhaps millions of Americans who may find themselves fighting for their right to vote in the Nov. 4 presidential election because of an increasing number of legal battles across the country regarding voting rights.

On Tuesday, the Montana Republican Party jumped into the fray when it challenged the eligibility of 6,000 registered voters in six counties that historically are Democratic strongholds.

The move means that registered voters in Missoula, Butte-Silver Bow, Lewis and Clark, Deer Lodge, Glacier and Hill counties who filled out a change-of-address card with the U.S. Postal Service in the past 18 months will have to verify their addresses before the Nov. 4 election.

Jake Eaton, executive director of the Montana Republican Party, said the challenge is not a partisan measure as Democrats claim; rather, it is designed to ensure the integrity of the election.

"The integrity of the voting process is something that has to be above reproach to have faith in the system," Eaton said. "We aren’t trying to prevent anyone from voting — we want people to register properly."

According to news reports from across the country, courtroom battles over voter registration, absentee ballots and the integrity of state voter lists are happening in politically strategic states such as Ohio, Florida, Michigan, Wisconsin and New York.

In Ohio, the state GOP tried to overturn a new state law that allows same-day registration and voting. State and federal courts upheld the law last week.

In Michigan, the state GOP reportedly plans to challenge the registrations of people who lost their homes to foreclosure.

In Wisconsin, the Republican attorney general is suing the state agency that oversees elections, saying that federal law requires that the agency check the names of more than 240,000 voters against driver records. Election clerks there say it is impossible to perform those checks by Nov. 4.
Democrats in Montana called the state GOP's challenge a thinly veiled attempt to suppress the votes of college students, minorities and the elderly — and they don't plan to sit by and watch it happen.

"The Democratic Party and the (Barack) Obama (presidential) campaign are exploring all legal options to protect Montanans' right to vote," said Obama's Montana campaign spokesman, Caleb Weaver.

Eaton said the challenge was spurred by comments made by Gov. Brian Schweitzer in which the governor claimed to have "turned some dials" to help get fellow Democrat Jon Tester elected to the U.S. Senate in 2006.

Republicans pounced on those comments, which were made at a trial lawyers' convention in Philadelphia in July, and recently brought to light, to accuse Schweitzer of vote tampering. The governor later said the comments were a joke.

Critics of the GOP's wide-ranging voter challenge say Republicans are disingenuously using Schweitzer's comments to justify a partisan tactic to suppress votes in heavily Democratic counties.

"My take on it is that it is a trumped-up attempt to disenfranchise voters that they don't think are going to vote for their guy, so they're using a made-up argument about voter fraud," said Matt Singer, director of Missoula-based Forward Progress, a youth-based political organization.

According to the Montana Secretary of State's Office, there has never been a large-scale challenge of voter eligibility of this kind in the state before now.

In 2007, the Legislative Audit Division completed a wide-ranging audit that checked for evidence of deceased individuals voting, incarcerated felons voting or duplicate voting in the 2006 election and found none.

Secretary of State Brad Johnson, a Republican, called the audit results a "victory for Montanans."

According to Johnson's spokesman, Bowen Greenwood, the state's voter database has been effective in heading off voter fraud in the past, and there is no reason to suspect that it wouldn't be just as effective in the future. He added that there is no evidence of massive voter fraud in any modern election in Montana.

"There have been documented instances of individuals who attempted to vote more than once but were prevented by the Statewide Voter Registration System — our database," Greenwood said.

He said the Montana Republican Party's challenge has made life difficult for elections officials in the affected counties.

"There is a right to challenge, but these challenges come at a time when our county elections officials are extraordinarily busy trying to get out absentee ballots and prepare for elections," Greenwood said. "This is very hard on the clerks, and it's frustrating that it has to be."

Missoula County Election Administrator Vickie Zeier said that in addition to having to process 3,422 voter registration challenges from the state GOP, she also has to get approximately 13,000 absentee ballots in the mail. On top of that, she also is fielding dozens of calls from journalists and voters concerned about their registration status.

She said she has six employees who are each putting in 10- to 12-hour days.

"I'm just trying to stay in front of the train somehow," she said.

Furey said his unit deploys early next week, so he doesn't know if he will be able to clear up the matter with Lewis and Clark County elections officials before he leaves.
"I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm going to be traveling between here and Kuwait and Iraq," Furey said. "I might be able to take care of something before I leave."

Eaton, an Iraq War veteran who served as an infantryman with the Montana National Guard from 2004-05, said Friday that he didn't know Furey was on the list. He added that he will attempt to withdraw his challenge to Furey's eligibility.

"I know what it means to serve, I know the hassles you go through before you deploy," Eaton said. "That is obviously a predicament that is near and dear to me because I've been there and know what he's going through. This is not about trying to prevent anybody from voting."