Beat: Miscellaneous

Texas warns election monitors to abide by state law or face arrest

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USPA News - Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott on Thursday warned international monitors observing next week`s presidential and Congressional election in the United States to either abide by state laws barring them from polling places or potentially face arrest if they refuse to do so. Abbott earlier this week sent a letter to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) after the organization announced it will send more than 100 parliamentarians from Europe and Central Asia to observe the November 6 elections in 15 states, including Texas, across the U.S. In the first letter, Abbott said it was unclear what the OSCE`s monitoring is intended to achieve or precisely what tactics would be used to carry out the monitoring.

He noted the OSCE`s plans to visit polling stations on November 6 as part of its monitoring plan, but warned that state law would make it a criminal offense for OSCE representatives to be within 100 feet (30 meters) of a polling place`s entrance. The United States is a founding member of the 56-country international organization which focuses on human rights and security and dispatches monitors to elections worldwide to ensure they meet international standards. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly previously observed elections in the United States in 2004, 2008 and 2010 without incident. "We are not coming to judge a result but to report about the process," said Portuguese Member of Parliament Joao Soares, who has been appointed to lead the observation mission to the United States. "In a country so well known for its diverse citizenry, we will observe how inclusive the election process is in line with the country`s own laws and international election commitments." But in a letter sent to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Thursday, Abbott said the federal government`s agreements with the OSCE are legally irrelevant because the nation`s federalist system allows states to administer their own elections. "OSCE is not above the law and its representatives must at all times comply with Texas law when they are present in this state," he said. Abbott said he was "particularly offended" that OSCE had met in April with a group of organizations that have filed lawsuits challenging election integrity laws enacted by the Texas Legislature. One of those organizations, Project Vote, is closely affiliated with the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) which collapsed following widespread voter-registration fraud. "Just this week, Project Vote boasted that it was advising OSCE on which issues to study - and which states to monitor - this election cycle," Abbott wrote in his letter to Clinton. "In light of Project Vote"s history of voter registration fraud and its more recent failed attempt to enjoin Texas election laws that were enacted to prevent fraud, no legitimate international body would affiliate with Project Vote." Abbott suggested the organization should instead look at a report authored by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker. "OSCE`s affiliation with this dubious organization necessarily undermines its credibility and the independence of its election monitors," he explained. The Texas official further added that OSCE should send its representatives to another state if it does not wish to follow Texas law. "We have no interest in being lectured by the OSCE about how best to conduct the State of Texas` business," he said. "Unlike the unelected bureaucrats at the OSCE, our State`s leaders and decision-makers were duly elected by Texas voters. Elected members of the Texas Legislature enacted the Texas Election Code to ensure our State`s elections are free, fair, open, and reliable." In Washington, D.C. earlier on Thursday, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the OSCE`s observation mission for next week`s election is no different from previous elections. She said the U.S. government provides "certain privileges and immunities" but not diplomatic immunity for OSCE observers, but it remains unclear whether Texas authorities could arrest the parliamentarians if they break local laws. "Please work with the OSCE to ensure they agree to comply with Texas law," Abbott asked of Clinton in Thursday`s letter, warning: "If they refuse to do so, OSCE`s representatives may be subject to legal consequences associated with any violations of state law."

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