

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Allison Dobson/ Maureen Knightly

July 26, 2005

202.224.3254

**Harkin Calls for Political Balance on
American Forces Media Programming**

Amendment to DOD Authorization Bill Would Provide

Oversight, Balance on American Forces Radio Broadcasts

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) today offered an amendment to the Defense Authorization bill to provide political balance in talk radio programming on American Forces Radio (AFR). The taxpayer-funded AFR broadcasts to American troops and military families stationed in more than 177 countries around the globe. Though these broadcasts are intended to provide a cross-section of what is heard by stateside audiences, not one minute of progressive talk radio programming is scheduled on any of AFR's 33 individually programmed radio stations.

“American Forces Radio is funded by taxpayers – conservatives, liberals and moderates alike,” **Harkin said**. “Unfortunately, it is failing to provide balanced representation of political viewpoints on its airwaves to American service members around the world.”

AFR is in violation of its own mandate, which states all political programming shall be characterized by its fairness and balance. **While the schedules for each of AFR's 33 individually programmed radio stations around the world provide a wide variety of music, sports, and news programming, not one minute of progressive talk radio programming is on the program schedules of these 33 stations. Conservative programming accounts for a cumulative total of 62 hours and 45 minutes of talk radio on AFR's stations each week.**

Although the DoD mandate is established in an internal DoD directive, there is currently no statutory requirement for AFR programming to be fair and balanced. Harkin's amendment would make into law AFR's obligation to provide political programming that is fair and balanced and establish an Office of the Ombudsman. The ombudsman would be appointed by the Secretary of Defense and be completely independent of DoD staff, reporting directly to the Secretary and to Congress. The ombudsman would make suggestions to AFR management regarding ways to correct imbalances and present an annual report to the Secretary of Defense and Congress on whether AFR is satisfying its mandate to provide fair and balanced political programming.

“There is no reason that American service members should receive lengthy right-wing commentaries with regularity on American Forces Radio's talk service, without some balance from competing views as part of that same service,” **Harkin said.** “For the good of its listeners, and to meet its own mandate, American Forces Radio needs to make a greater effort to give a balanced, fair representation of varying political viewpoints on its talk radio service.”

#