



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Defending Our Democracy: Building Partnerships to Protect America's Elections

February 13, 2019

Election security is a national security issue that must transcend party politics, because it requires a unified effort to protect America's elections. Unfortunately, this hearing is long overdue. During the 115th Congress, the Republican Majority spent much of its time ignoring the intelligence and refusing to acknowledge the threat to our democracy.

Frustrated by the lack of action on this critical issue, Democrats on this Committee and the Committee on House Administration launched the Congressional Task Force on Election Security in July 2017. The Task Force met with dozens of elections experts, State election officials, and national security experts to assess vulnerabilities in election infrastructure and determine how to address them. In February 2018, the Task Force produced a report that included ten recommendations and introduced legislation to implement them.

That legislation is now part of H.R. 1, the For the People Act, which the House is expected to consider in the coming weeks. Fortunately, since 2016, progress has been made toward more secure elections.

The Department of Homeland Security and Election Assistance Commission (EAC) have built stronger, more effective partnerships with State and local election officials. But it is unclear whether either agency has the resources necessary to meet the increasing demand for their resources.

Will EAC's \$10 million budget provide sufficient resources for it to administer additional election security grants to states? Does DHS have the resources to provide its services to every State and county that requests them?

Congress needs to understand the existing capability of each agency and how existing capabilities can be leveraged, grown, and augmented. Local election officials are on the frontlines of securing our elections, and their success depends on the support they receive from Federal and State governments.

Although some dispute that the election infrastructure local election officials oversee is vulnerable to hacking, cybersecurity experts have made a credible case it is. The Federal government – especially Congress – must understand the resource constraints of local election officials and partner with them to address vulnerabilities to election infrastructure through grants and services.

The intelligence community has made clear the threats to our elections persist, so more work remains to be done. Just last month, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats warned, "Russia in 2016 and unidentified actors as recently as 2018 have already conducted cyber activity that has targeted US election infrastructure." He went on to say we should expect "adversaries and strategic competitors to refine their capabilities and add new tactics as they learn from each other's experiences" in advance of the 2020 elections.

I look forward to hearing from our panel of witnesses today about how Congress and federal agencies can support efforts to further strengthen our elections and protect them from attack. I welcome my Republican colleagues' support in these efforts, and I look forward to working with all those whose goal is to protect America's elections and defend our democracy.

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