

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

Congressional Taskforce on Election Security Forum

“Securing America’s Elections: Preparing for 2018 and Beyond”

Tuesday, October 24th

As this task force convenes for our second public forum focused on securing our election infrastructure from further foreign interference, I am concerned that with each passing day we, as a country, are not moving forward with security preparations for upcoming elections.

It is clear to everyone that during the 2016 campaign cycle Russia used tactical cyber hacks and misinformation campaigns to attack our elections systems and undermine confidence in our democratic process. Based on past attempts, we know that a country like Russia, with a leader like Putin, they will be back with ultimate goal of destabilizing democratic institutions.

Therefore, it is imperative that we not only understand the threat posed by outside actors, but also the systematic and program challenges faced by state and local election officials. We cannot ask our State and local election officials to take on a State actor like Russia alone.

During our September Task Force Forum, we heard from former Secretary of Homeland Security, Jeh Johnson, and former DHS Under Secretary for the National Protection and Programs Directorate, Suzanne Spaulding, about the national security risks and vulnerabilities to our election infrastructure. We also heard about how the Federal government can help States address these risks and vulnerabilities to ensure the interferences that occurred in 2016 do not happen in future elections.

Today, we will hear from those who have made a career of ensuring that our elections remain open, fair, and protected. I look forward to hearing about efforts States are undertaking to secure election infrastructure and whether the Department of Homeland Security is providing the assistance states need when they need it.

As we move into the final weeks of the Task Force’s work, I would encourage our panelists to be open and candid about their concerns and challenges so that we can put forth constructive recommendations. Too often when we discuss election security, our conversations become politicized.

However, protected elections are not about whether Americans are casting their votes for Democrats, Republicans, or Independents. Instead, protected elections are about making sure foreign governments are not hijacking American votes.

The cooperation of State and local governments and stakeholders is imperative to secure our elections and, therefore, our American democracy. Today, I look forward to a productive discussion about how we can work together to do just that.