



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, & Innovation Subcommittee Chairwoman Yvette Clarke (D-NY)

Securing Democracy: Protecting Against Threats to Election Infrastructure and Voter Confidence

January 20, 2022

I would like to thank the witnesses for participating in today's hearing on how we can secure our democracy against threats to election systems, as well as efforts to undermine voter confidence and faith in democratic institutions.

So much has changed since this Committee held its first, dedicated election security hearing in 2019 – which was already about two years too late. That's because in 2017 – as the rest of us were waking up to grave security threats posed to our nation's under-funded, outdated voting systems – Republicans controlled the House. And, despite multiple requests by Committee Democrats to hold hearings on election security, the Republican Chairman largely declined to do so – except for a single hearing on threats to elections and other critical infrastructure.

Still, Democrats got to work. The Democratic Task Force on Election Security worked to find solutions and make investments to help state and local officials upgrade and improve systems. And when Democrats regained control of the House in 2019, this work did not cease – it accelerated. We secured funding for election upgrades at the state level and built up capacity at the Federal level – empowering the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, or CISA, to work with election officials, vendors, and other stakeholders to harden voting systems around the country. At the end of the day, we made enormous progress. Roughly 96% of voters used voter-verifiable paper ballots – and the results were validated by legitimate, credible post-election audits in every swing state.

Election security experts called the 2020 election the “most secure in American history” – in a year with historically high turnout, during a global pandemic. It's hard to square that with what happened next. The outgoing President ratcheted up a disinformation campaign he'd been carrying out, in the open, for weeks – to lay the groundwork to explain any election loss he might incur as the result of massive voter fraud, at a scale never before seen in history. Despite the obvious absurdity and total lack of evidence – former President Trump was somehow able to parlay this message into a campaign so effective that he convinced 145 Republican Members of this very Chamber to vote against certification of the election results. That same day, thousands of Trump supporters mobbed the U.S. Capitol with nooses, bear spray, and zip ties – inflicting serious or even fatal injuries on Capitol Police officers sent here to protect and serve. We, as a nation, will be dealing with the fallout from the 2020 election for a long time to come.

Today, “election denialists” are running for office across the country, and State legislatures are pursuing fake, partisan audits and restrictive voting laws that will do nothing more than create another barrier for voters of color to cross to cast their vote. Recent polls suggest that one in three voters question the legitimacy of the 2020 election. And, one in three election officials feels unsafe in their job. I began this statement by talking about the efforts of Democrats to secure elections – not as a pat on the back or to

inflare partisan divisions. But rather, because I believe we are at an inflection point in our nation's history – where terms like 'election security' and 'election integrity' are being weaponized in ways that I have never seen before.

As long as we're opening up the proper scope of those terms, let me tell you how I define election security: (1) making sure that every eligible voter who wants to cast a vote is able to cast it, and (2) making sure that vote is counted as it was cast. Anything that undermines either of those tenets – whether that's restrictive voting laws, disinformation that threatens the health of our republic, or outdated voting machines that can be exploited by hackers – is a threat to election security. That is why this hearing will cover the waterfront of issues that threaten secure elections today – even those outside the realm of cybersecurity.

I am also profoundly concerned about the fractured state of our information ecosystem – and the ability of media consumers to simply choose their own reality based on the Facebook groups they join and the cable news outlets they choose to watch. This is a major, existential threat to our democracy – and I look forward to hearing from this panel to see how we might start to rebuild faith in democratic institutions.

Finally, I believe the Federal government – and CISA in particular – has a role to play in confronting the mis- and disinformation narratives that jeopardize our faith in free and fair elections, and other issues that threaten our national security, public health, and safety. That is why I am introducing legislation to authorize CISA to identify, track, and address mis and disinformation through efforts like the Rumor Control website. The best way to attack a lie is with the truth, and I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will join me in supporting CISA's efforts to "prebunk" and debunk the kind of disinformation that erodes our democracy.

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