



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, & Innovation Subcommittee Chairman Cedric Richmond (D-LA)

Secure, Safe, and Auditable: Protecting the Integrity of the 2020 Elections August 4, 2020

We all have a stake in ensuring safe, secure, and auditable elections in November. This hearing comes a week after we laid to rest a giant in the fight for voting rights. Before he died, Congressman Lewis reminded us that “[t]he vote is the most powerful nonviolent change agent you have in a democratic society. You must use it because it is not guaranteed. You can lose it.” We must vigorously defend our right to vote, our access to the ballot box, and the integrity of our elections.

In less than 100 days, Americans across the country will participate in an election unlike any other in our history. The COVID-19 pandemic is forcing state and local election officials to rapidly expand vote-by-mail, early voting, and other crowd-reducing election policies so no voter has to choose between their democratic rights and their health.

As states scrambled to administer safe primary elections this spring, seemingly administrative decisions related to the number and location of polling sites had substantive impacts on people’s voting rights. Long lines and crowded polling locations in predominantly black and brown neighborhoods raised the stress levels in communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and police violence and underscored that the existence of systemic racism as is an injustice that we must still overcome. And we have a president who has repeatedly tried to manipulate a news cycle, going so far as to falsely suggest he can move the election date and, more insidiously, making baseless claims about the security of vote-by-mail.

This behavior, in service to his own narcissistic political ends, softens the turf for dangerous foreign influence campaigns and puts Americans who want to exercise the franchise at risk. For the record, the President does not have the power to move the date of the November election. Moreover, last Friday the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency released a risk assessment of vote-by-mail.

CISA concluded that while there are risks associated with mail-in voting – just as there with every other method of voting – those risks can be mitigated. Further, I am not aware of any intelligence assessment indicating that foreign actors have expressed interest or capability to successfully interfere with vote-by-mail processes. We must learn the lessons of our recent elections and do better in November.

First, we must prepare Americans for the reality that elections will be administered differently this fall. We must educate voters about vote-by-mail, its related deadlines, and how expanded vote-by-mail might affect the timing of election results. We must encourage participation in vote-by-mail while inoculating the public from disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining confidence election results.

Second, we must ensure that changes to USPS service standards do not jeopardize vote-by-mail, and that election officials seeking to expand vote-by-mail coordinate with the Postal Service to coordinate vote-by-mail policies and deadlines. Third, we must ensure election officials do not use COVID-19 as a pretext for making administrative decisions that could disenfranchise voters. Time and again, the

impacts of dysfunctional and chaotic election administration fall hardest on black and brown communities. Election officials must be deliberate in their efforts to ensure that no community is disenfranchised.

Fourth, we must not forget the lessons of 2016. It was around this time in 2016 when the Russian foreign interference campaign engaged in hack and dump operations against one candidate, and targeted election systems in all 50 states. We must continue to improve the security of election infrastructure and campaign organizations, and improve the public's resilience to foreign influence campaigns.

Finally, we need to be honest with ourselves about what it will take to administer safe, secure, and auditable elections this fall. It has been over 10 weeks since the House passed the HEROES Act, which would provide \$3.6 billion in funding to support state and local election officials. Despite urgent requests for additional resources from state and local election officials across the country, the Senate never voted on the HEROES Act, nor did include any election administration funding in the COVID response package it released late last month.

As House and Senate negotiations on COVID relief package continue, I urge my Senate colleagues to step up and provide state and local election officials the funding they need to administer safe, secure, and auditable elections this November. I look forward to hearing from the witness today their recommendations for Congress on ways to give Americans more opportunities to vote this November, and to ensure the safety and integrity of the election.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978