



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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Hearing Statement of Vice Chairman Ritchie Torres (D-NY)

The Changing Election Security Landscape: Threats to Election Officials and Infrastructure

July 20, 2022

Free and fair elections are the bedrock of our democracy. As we learned just over 18 months ago, democracy is not something we can take for granted. We must defend it fiercely and protect the institutions that uphold it. So, I commend the Chairman for holding this important hearing on the threats to our elections.

When I was first eligible to vote in 2006, election offices across the country were in the process of replacing infrastructure to defend against the greatest threat to elections in recent history: the notorious “hanging chad.” Social media was new, and largely a way for young college kids to connect. Our adversaries had not figured out how to weaponize our freedom of speech or our technological ingenuity and use it against us.

The notion that an armed crowd would descend upon the United States Capitol to disrupt the peaceful transition of power would have been beyond anyone’s wildest imagination. And harassing election officials to alter an election result was something relegated to developing democracies or democracies in decline. But the 2016 election ushered in a new era of threats to our democracy.

The Russian government targeted election infrastructure and exploited social media to spread conspiracy theories to tip the scales in favor of one candidate and, more devastatingly, begin to sow doubt among the public about the integrity of our democratic institutions. Committee Democrats recognized the urgent national security threat the Russian government had created, and established an Election Security Task Force with Members of the House Administration Committee to better understand threats to elections and how to mitigate against them. Unfortunately, we did not get bipartisan support to implement the Task Force’s recommendations, and efforts to enact them into law have languished in the Senate for two Congresses.

In the meantime, our adversaries redoubled their efforts to sow division among us, and some desperate politicians latched on to the “big lie” and other conspiracy theories. As a result, three days after I was sworn into my first term in Congress, a violent mob stormed the Capitol, forcing me and my staff to evacuate, and held democracy hostage to a unfounded lie.

Outside Washington, election officials have found themselves victims of harassment and threats in a way we have never seen before. As a result, election offices across the country are struggling to retain a trained staff, exacerbating the existing challenges associated with administering the 2022 midterm elections.

When we were sworn in as Members of this chamber, we took an oath to protect and defend the Constitution and the democratic principles enshrined in it. It is incumbent upon all of us to understand evolving threats to our elections and to defend against them.

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