



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

DHS's Progress in Security Election Systems and Other Critical Infrastructure

July 11, 2018

Under Secretary Krebs, you have taken this job at a critical moment for our nation; however, I am concerned you do not have the support you need from the White House. You are responsible for building private sector confidence in DHS' information-sharing programs like Automated Indicator Sharing, after President Trump toyed with the idea of planting an absurd story to discredit it for his own political purposes.

You are responsible for securing Federal networks at a time when the White House's National Security Advisor has decided to eliminate the National Security Council's cybersecurity coordinator. You are responsible for helping secure critical infrastructure networks for a White House that would rather save jobs in China than heed the advice of the Intelligence Community on supply chain vulnerabilities. And you are responsible for helping State and local governments secure election infrastructure following Russia's brazen election meddling efforts in 2016, which the President has been reluctant to call out and which Congressional Republicans, until recently, were content to ignore.

As we sit here today, President Trump is in Europe complicating your mission. Instead of working with our European allies to confront Russia – a shared adversary whose attempts to undermine Western democratic institutions are growing more and more bold – he is trolling them to curry favor with Russian President Vladimir Putin. President Trump has said he will address Russia's 2016 election meddling in a meeting with Putin, but he has never demonstrated a credible ability to confront Putin with our Intelligence Community's findings. He has predicted his meeting with Putin "may be the easiest," so I have no reason to believe anything productive will come of it. This President's failure to take seriously the threat to our democracy is one of the main reasons that we must do effective and thorough oversight in this body.

Although I am pleased that the Majority has finally scheduled today's hearing, I am disappointed that the Majority failed to invite a full range of stakeholders, including the Election Assistance Commission, or hold the hearing at a time when DHS' Federal partners were available to participate. It is important for the record that Committee Democrats have been requesting official oversight activities on election security since before the 2016 election.

And in March 2017, after months of inaction by the Republican majority, I introduced a Resolution of Inquiry seeking information from the Department on its activities related to countering Russian election interference in the 2016 Presidential election so we would understand how to protect our elections in the future. It was unceremoniously rejected along party lines.

Committee Democrats have written to the Chairman no less than five times since August

2016 to request a hearing, briefing, or investigation on vulnerabilities to our election infrastructure. We have also reiterated these requests on numerous occasions on the record. Despite these repeated requests, this Committee did not conduct a formal hearing or briefing on the topic until April 2018 – 15 months after the Intelligence Community released its report concluding that the Russian government had attempted to interfere in the 2016 elections and would attempt to do so again.

When the Trump Administration’s six top intelligence officials testified before the Senate that Russia was targeting our 2018 elections, this Committee—the Committee that prides itself on acting in the wake of current issues— followed suit of the House Republican Conference by shirking its responsibility to act on this urgent threat.

Ranking Members of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee, Judiciary Committee, the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the House Armed Services, and the House Administration Committee have all urged their Chairs or Speaker Ryan to aggressively address this ongoing national security threat. Our calls for action were ignored, responded to with a half-hearted acknowledgement of the threat and a vague promise for future action, or the offer to ask a government witness about election security at a hearing on another topic.

Because our requests for thorough hearings and briefings were denied, some Committee Democrats joined with Democrats on the Committee on House Administration to form the Congressional Task Force on Election Security. I openly asked Republicans to join us and submit their ideas, yet no Republican Member provided their input or attended the task force’s public events.

After studying the topic for eight months, meeting with stakeholders, and holding a series of forums and briefings, the Task Force produced a report and introduced legislation to implement the recommendations. H.R. 5011, the Election Security Act, currently has over 100 cosponsors – all Democrats. The legislation would, among other things:

- provide ongoing support to State and local governments to secure election infrastructure, instead of addressing election challenges crisis-to-crisis;
- direct the Department of Homeland Security to assess the resources it needs to carry out its election security responsibilities and submit a request to Congress; and
- establish mechanisms to ensure that State election officials have timely access to actionable threat information.

I have asked this Committee to consider H.R. 5011, and today renew my request for consideration of this legislation. Even though Congress appropriated some additional funding for DHS and the States to improve election security in the FY 2018 omnibus, it was merely a down-payment on what is required. H.R. 5011 would help provide the states with the appropriate level of funding.

Today’s other witness, Rhode Island Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea, participated in one of our Task Force forums in October. She provided important insight into the resources the Federal government was making available to States, the resources States need to secure election infrastructure, and proactive activities she was undertaking at the State level to improve election security. I am glad that Secretary Gorbea is here with us again today, and I look forward to her and Under Secretary Krebs’ testimony. Securing our elections is part and parcel to securing our democracy.

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