

Written Testimony of John R. Ashcroft

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Thank you, Chairman Blunt and distinguished committee members, for the opportunity to join you here today for this important discussion regarding the security of our elections. My name is John Ashcroft, and it is my distinct privilege and honor to serve as the 40th Secretary of State for the great people of the state of Missouri. Notably, this is an office administered at one time by the chairman of this committee.

I decided to run for secretary of state because of my four children. My goal was to ensure their voices and those of future generations would continue to be heard at the ballot box. One of the priorities of my campaign was to enact legislation that both increased the security of our votes and made sure that every registered voter could vote. Simply put, in Missouri, "if you're registered, you can vote, and your vote will count."

Elections are the bedrock of our democratic republic, as they are how we the people consent to be governed. The integrity of these elections is of the utmost importance every day when I go to my office in Jefferson City, and I know my fellow election officials across the country share that same concern and dedication.

I welcome today's conversation to talk about election security preparations, but before we move forward, we should briefly look back to the impetus of why we are all here today: Allegations that outside actors threatened the integrity of our elections during the 2016 election cycle. While these are serious allegations, it is vitally important to understand that after two years of investigation, there is no credible evidence that these incidents caused a single vote or voter registration to be improperly altered during the 2016 election cycle. It was not our votes that were hacked, it was the perception that was hacked.

Secondly, every reported cyber incident in 2016 involving state election systems was first detected by state election authorities. In each case, election authorities brought the incident to the attention of federal authorities, not the other way around.

This is not to say that our elections are perfect, that there was no fraud, that there were no unlawful corruptions of votes or vote totals. The evidence indicates that voter fraud is an exponentially greater threat than hacking of election equipment. In 2010, well before elections being altered rose to the forefront of the public conversation, there was a race for a Missouri state house seat that was decided by one vote. Yes, just one vote. Election authorities conclusively determined in that election that there were two voters (who also happened to be family members of the victorious candidate) that voted illegally. Despite the fact that the candidate's relatives admitted to illegally voting and ultimately pled guilty to their election offenses, their nephew now serves in the Missouri Senate.

Consequently, moving forward, any meaningful enhancement to election security must take a comprehensive approach to ensure that every legally registered voter is allowed to vote and that their vote is not diluted by any sort of voter fraud, malfeasance, or ineptitude. Moreover, we must avoid knee jerk reactions that would give voters a false sense of security.

In its current format, the Secure Elections Act focuses on improving communication between federal agencies and states regarding cyber threats and election security. That is a good start. However any communication mandates must remedy the failure of federal agencies to communicate and work with local election authorities. States have and will continue to work with federal agencies regardless of any new legislation. However there is a longstanding problem of federal officials refusing to share valuable information with state election officials. The National Association of Secretaries of State has passed resolutions since 2012 calling on the federal government to meet its statutory obligations to share information with state election officials.

As important as this information sharing is, there are numerous other ways to protect our elections beyond information sharing.

Proposed changes should recognize the value of allowing state election officials to remain in control of elections. I have learned that winning an election does not make you an elections expert any more than watching a Fourth of July celebration makes you a rocket scientist. Time spent in the trenches on Election Day, as an official or as a poll worker, is what make one an expert, and legislation should respect that.

I'll close by noting to a certain extent the irony of the time in which we are living. A little over a decade ago, in the wake of the last period of heightened national interest in the administration of this country's elections, at hearings just like this, the all-knowing federal government assured elections experts that all that we needed to do was switch to electronic voting equipment. It was the determination, in the wake of the 2000 presidential election, that the use of electronic voting equipment was the only way to guarantee every American vote was accurately reflected in the election results. Now, the same all-knowing federal government is telling election experts to stop using electronic equipment; that paper is the only way to truly verify election results.

Working together, it is my hope that we can forge a comprehensive framework of protections to enhance our sacred democracy. Thank you very much.