

Testimony of Wayne J. Bena
Nebraska Deputy Secretary of State for Elections
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Good afternoon, Chairperson Klobuchar, Ranking Member Fischer, and members of the Rules and Administration Committee. My name is Wayne Bena, and I have the honor and privilege of serving as Nebraska's Deputy Secretary of State for Elections.

Before serving the state, I served my community in Sarpy County as their Election Commissioner. That role gave me on-the-ground experience in what it takes to operate elections efficiently and effectively. In my 14 years of election administration, I've seen Nebraska Elections Officials rise to the critical challenges of cybersecurity, conducting elections in a pandemic, census delays, and election-related misinformation.

On the cybersecurity front, Nebraska is always working to address potential areas of concern in our election processes. In 2018, we led the way in securing our voter registration system. Nebraska implemented multi-factor authentication to prevent unauthorized access, in addition to installing a computer intrusion detection device called an Albert Sensor which detects malicious activity. The installation of this sensor has been replicated in seven other states and won the National Association of State Elections Directors Inaugural "Election Innovation Award" in 2019.

In 2020, during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nebraska election officials came together to hold one of the only statewide primaries in the month of May. We had every polling site in the state open with the required number of poll workers. Our county election officials worked tirelessly to ensure Nebraskans could vote in-person safely. Voters in that election set the record for the most ballots cast in a Nebraska Primary.

Only a year later in 2021, when the Census was late for the first time in our country, Nebraska officials were on the forefront of challenging the Census Bureau to release population data earlier than proposed. We wanted to allow enough time for election officials to implement new district lines for the 2022 elections. Nebraska was third in the nation to finish their federal and state redistricting work. That efficiency resulted in no delays in administering our May 2022 primary.

In 2022, Nebraska expanded its post-election manual audit from 2 to 3 percent of precincts statewide to 10 percent of the precincts with at least one precinct selected in every county. During this audit, election officials across the state manually counted three separate races on over 48,292 ballots with only 11 discrepancies discovered. That's an error rate of twenty-three thousandths of one percent. This post-election audit provided valuable data in each county to verify the accuracy of our ballot-counting equipment. Let me be clear, this expanded audit was not easy. But it provides another example of how our election officials go above and beyond to ensure the utmost integrity in our elections.

I am proud to work with Nebraska's county election commissioners, county clerks, their staff, and their poll workers. We have handled all challenges before us one day at a time and one deadline at a time. They are our friends, family members, and our neighbors. They are the reason Nebraska's elections are a model for the country.

There is no doubt that challenges lie ahead in 2024. Voters will undoubtedly hear numerous times that this will be the most important election in their lifetime. The Presidential general election will draw the most voters we will see in a four-year cycle and interest will be at an all-time high. Under Nebraska Secretary of State Bob Evnen's leadership, the elections division will work hard with our County Election officials to ensure Nebraska elections will continue to be safe, accurate and secure.

I wanted to take a moment to thank my team. The members of the Election Division are a dedicated group of individuals who ensure our counties receive the backing and resources they need to be successful. I was once told to hire people smarter than you and give them the tools and resources to be successful. I couldn't ask for a better group of people to work with.

In closing, I would like to say to voters across this country: Your ballot will be waiting for you... Go Cast It.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to our continued discussion not only today but in the years to come.