



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ)
of the Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight

Joint Subcommittee Hearing:
Election Security: Voting Technology Vulnerabilities
Tuesday, June 25, 2019

Good afternoon, and welcome to a joint hearing of the Investigations and Oversight and Research & Technology Subcommittees. It's good to be here with Ranking Member Norman, Chairwoman Stevens and Ranking Member Baird once again.

We're here today to talk about election security and the various technologies and best practices that support it. And I want to start out by acknowledging something good:

The experts tell us that the United States has, in fact, made enormous progress since 2016 toward protecting our election infrastructure. I applaud the Secretaries of State, the election officials, the poll workers and the systems administrators across this nation who have already been working hard to defy election interference. New Jersey, for example, is investing in a whole range of activities right now to prevent interference, including a pilot program for voter verified paper trails.

But I remain worried about the enormous risks our election systems still face heading into 2020. And I have been really concerned about how attacks on our election system affect the American psyche. We have all seen anecdotes in the press about counties and states across the United States, where experts learn after the fact that an election system has been hacked. It is worth pointing out that we don't always see election systems actually being breached when they are targeted. Sometimes our systems work the way they are supposed to and keep intruders from doing harm.

And we should find comfort when we learn of a crisis averted. But for the most part, we don't. These stories in the news allow us to see just how high the stakes are. They allow us to see how many ways there are to manipulate the system. These stories make the American people feel uncertain. And our peace of mind, our faith in the electoral process, is another casualty of interference. There are few things more central to the American covenant than the safety and security of our elections, where citizens from all walks of life can cast their vote and know it will be counted.

Our foreign adversaries know this. The last two election cycles saw foreign interference in our election systems that tried to shake our faith in the U.S. election system – and in our fellow Americans. When I was in the Navy, I was a Russian policy officer and I saw firsthand how the Russians work to sow divisions. We know the Russian intelligence service has already attacked our election infrastructure across a number of states, and we have every reason to believe these attacks will escalate during the 2020 cycle. The methods that foreign and domestic actors use to corrupt our elections are growing more sophisticated every day. When it comes to cybersecurity, the threat is constantly changing. It is our responsibility in Congress to help states arm themselves with advanced, adaptive strategies to prevent, detect, and recover from intrusions.

On a lighter note - I am delighted to welcome a special guest to the gallery today, Ms. Bianca Lewis. Bianca just finished seventh grade in Phillipsburg, New Jersey. She is a coder and inventor who runs her own blog dedicated to her adventures in STEAM – that’s science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics. Bianca was also one of the young hackers featured at an exhibit that was hosted at last year’s Def Con technology conference in Las Vegas called the R00tz Asylum. At Def Con, Bianca and other young people were able to exploit models of Secretary of State websites to delete content and change voting results being displayed. While the websites at Def Con were models and not part of any real-life voting systems, they were designed with some of the known vulnerabilities that real-life hackers have abused in recent years.

I thank Bianca for being a leader for girls in tech and computer science – and for helping shine a light on cybersecurity in election infrastructure. It is so rewarding to see that the next generation is thinking big - about big challenges. I’m glad that you and your family could be here from New Jersey for today’s hearing.

I am also pleased to welcome the distinguished witnesses on our panel, three of whom contributed to the very important recent report from the National Academies on Securing the Vote. Thank you all for being here.