Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

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

Thank you Madam Chair, and I would like to join you in welcoming our witnesses this afternoon.

I'm glad we're holding this hearing today on such an important topic. The election system is decentralized and complicated. There are many different aspects of it that rely on technology in some form. As a result, there are numerous challenges and solutions to making sure our election system is secure, fair and accessible. Elections security, as we all know, is an active topic of conversation in Congress right now, as it should be. It is an urgent topic for our nation.

The Science Committee will do what it does best today – we will talk about the technology. My home state of Texas is a case study in how advanced technologies are both promising and perilous when it comes to the administration of elections. The 2018 election cycle saw a terrible episode in Texas in which malfunctioning electronic voting machines ended up changing some voters' selections from Democrat to Republican, and deleted some voters all together. This occurred across at least 78 counties. And the machines where this happened were paperless, which means it was impossible to go back and compare the voters' intent with what the device actually recorded. To underscore the gravity of what happened in 2018, the Texas Civil Rights Project issued a statement that this event "is threatening to call into question the entire election in Texas." To wit, in a court case that resulted from a similar episode in the state of Georgia, a judge ultimately decided that continued use of paperless systems can harm our constitutional rights to a free and fair election.

We were somewhat relieved to learn that cybersecurity experts believe that the voting machine anomalies in Texas can be attributed to old technology and not to hackers. But it is easy to imagine how a bad actor might seek to take advantage of exactly this kind of vulnerability in Texas and across the country. On the other hand, Texas is looking at some exciting reforms. This year the Texas House is considering legislation that would implement automatic voter registration when eligible residents interface with the Department of Motor Vehicles. This proposal will not only make it more convenient for citizens to participate in the democratic process, it will also save money for state elections administrators and may help make the registration process more secure.

I hope that the experiences we have in Texas can be used as lessons learned for other states. In fact, I believe almost every state and jurisdiction is working hard to improve their systems and make them more secure and accessible. The Federal government has a role in shepherding the development of voluntary guidelines for secure elections and in providing technical and other assistance to state and local election administrators. We all need to learn from each other. Our very democracy is on the line.

I want to thank Chairwoman Sherrill, Ranking Member Norman, Chairwoman Stevens and Ranking Member Baird for holding this hearing, and I yield back the balance of my time.