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U.S. Senate Committee on Rules & Administration
Hearing on “Ongoing Threats to Elections Administration”
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Chairwoman Klobuchar, Ranking Member Fischer, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss ongoing threats to elections administration in the State of Arizona and the preparations we are making to ensure our democratic process is safe and accessible for the upcoming presidential election cycle.

I was elected Arizona Secretary of State in 2022 on a platform of preserving our democracy. I was fortunate to receive support from across the political spectrum to provide stability and security for Arizona’s electoral process.

I earned the trust of the voters in my race for Secretary of State based on my proven record in elections administration as Maricopa County Recorder. Upon taking office in 2016, my team worked in a bipartisan manner to upgrade equipment and processes to ensure more accessible and secure elections. Maricopa County is one of the largest voting jurisdictions in the U.S. – second only to Los Angeles County. It is also one of the fastest growing. In fact, our office saw an increase in the number of registered voters by 500,000 in four years.

In 2020, even with record voter turnout, and despite emergency pandemic restrictions, and a pernicious campaign of misinformation, our team in Maricopa County ran a good election that has been analyzed and audited and, at the end of the day, proven to be safe, secure, and accurate.

In my role as Arizona Secretary of State, I am dedicated to the following premise: it is the American voter who should dictate outcomes, not partisan leaning officials or foreign actors, attempting to manipulate our systems through misinformation. Like my other colleagues in election administration, for whom I have the utmost respect, I am focused on the election process and ensuring that every eligible voter can cast their ballot with the confidence that their election is fair and has integrity.

The High Cost of Election Lies: Historic Turnover Among Arizona Election Officials

In Arizona, our democracy remains strong. But with all the election misinformation and related threats, comes a grave human cost. Partially due to threats and intimidation, Arizona today ranks second in the nation for negative turnover among top election officials. Since 2020, 12 out of 15 Arizona counties have lost a top official—either an elected County Recorder or appointed Election Director, and in some counties, both. A recent Issue One report¹ calculated that Arizona has lost 176 combined years of senior election administration expertise.

As a former County Recorder myself, I can attest that the pre-2020 world for election officials is gone.

¹ Issue One. (2023). *The High Cost of High Turnover*. <https://issueone.org/articles/the-high-cost-of-high-turnover/>

Today, we live with the reality of having ‘go bags’ for members of our families, so that we can leave our homes at a moment’s notice. This isn’t theory, it’s the reality in my own home. In this heightened threat environment, it seems that nothing and no one is safe. Just ask a former County Recorder in my state about her dogs, poisoned as a means of intimidation. Hers is one of many veteran Arizona officials—from both parties—to move on from a career in election administration for the sake of their own physical, mental and emotional safety, and that of their families.

The cost of persistent misrepresentations about the integrity of our elections is high. But the cost of inaction is higher. My office, as well as the offices of my fellow Secretaries of State, continue to work to mitigate these challenges as we prepare for the 2024 Presidential election cycle. Measures we have taken in my office to address the loss of institutional knowledge and expertise in elections include:

- Intensive training through initial certification classes for new election officials and recertification courses and workshops for all our full-time Arizona election officials—from Election Directors to warehouse workers.
- Developing a more user-friendly Elections Procedures Manual that clearly defines the duties and responsibilities of election officials under state and federal law.
- Hiring the first statewide Chief Information Security Officer dedicated to elections to guide and provide support to local and county officials in the

areas of cyber and physical security in coordination with state and federal security officials.

- Instituting monthly security update meetings bringing in experts on emerging technologies, security techniques and other election administration issues
- Planning and executing tabletop security exercises to help election officials prepare and practice against new cyber security, environmental, situational and other threats

The next tabletop security exercise we will be hosting includes officials from all 15 of our counties working directly with officials from state partners like the Arizona Counter-Terrorism and Information Center (ACTIC) and federal agencies including CISA, and other law enforcement partners.

My Assistant Secretary of State is also a member of the Election Workforce Advisory Council, a joint effort by the Bipartisan Policy Center and the Elections Group to retain experienced election professionals while recruiting top talent. The goal of this Council is to ensure that elections continue to be run by experienced professionals for decades to come.

Artificial Intelligence: The Next Big Threat to Voter Trust & Election Integrity

Misinformation about the integrity, security, and accuracy of our elections is among the dark forces that are driving issues like high staff turnover in Arizona and across the U.S. As we move into the 2024 Presidential Election cycle, Artificial Intelligence (AI) threatens to supercharge these concerns. Generative AI has the

potential to confuse and disenfranchise voters, wreak havoc on usually trusted sources of information, and disrupt the normal administration of elections. Let me give you an example of a concern that's been keeping me up at night.

A bad actor working for a foreign government could create an AI-generated deepfake of their Secretary of State telling voters, for example, that due to a power outage at polling locations in their county, we've relocated their polling place to a different address. People would see false images and hear audio with my face and voice delivering this AI-generated misinformation. Imagine the confusion—perhaps amplified by local, statewide and social media—as people circle parking lots in random parts of town attempting to vote. Imagine further, that this confusion turns to anger or perhaps worse.

Social media alone has the capacity to spread these deepfakes far and wide with alarming speed. If we thereafter attempt to go on TV, radio or Instagram Live to debunk the deepfakes, how would people know that it is their real Secretary of State this time?

Foreign actors from hostile states such as Iran, China, Russia and North Korea are ready to take advantage of this nightmare scenario. And we believe that diverse communities will be an important target of these anti-democratic efforts to extend the influence of disinformation campaigns and enable interference in American elections.

These threats notwithstanding, we are meeting these types of challenges head on. We are working directly with our state and federal partners to build up trusted sources of information that help pre-bunk, not just debunk, election misinformation, which could be created and amplified by generative AI. We are taking proactive steps to build voter trust, and preparing election officials for this challenging new threat environment, including:

- Working with our partners at the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) and the National Association of State Election Directors (NASED) on a nonpartisan initiative to highlight state and local election officials as the credible, verified sources for election information.²
- Certifying election equipment in a live steamed environment with bipartisan and other community observers.
- Upgrading our statewide voter registration database to protect from AI-generated attacks, increasing accuracy and security, and building confidence in the overall performance of our elections.
- Partnering with CISA on cyber security threat assessments of critical election systems. Starting with the offering of Albert sensors, our partnership and technology tools provided by CISA have only grown as we defend against foreign actors who are committed to wreaking havoc on our election systems and our democracy.

² National Association of Secretaries of State. (2023). #TrustedInfo Initiative. <https://www.nass.org/initiatives/trustedinfo>

- Upgrading our processes to ensure that our military and overseas voters have a more accessible and secure way to vote through a federal grant from the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP).

More Federal Assistance Needed to Address the Growing Threat to our Elections

Federal agencies have been crucial partners to our efforts to address the threats to election administration and prepare for the 2024 Presidential election cycle and beyond.

In addition to assisting with the distribution of critical Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds and certification of voting equipment, the Election Assistance Commission's (EAC) best practice guides, training videos and the new Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) templates have been exceptionally helpful to my office and to Arizona counties—especially those with new election administrators.

We appreciate the efforts of the USPS to prioritize and protect election mail, and partner with us on best practices for ensuring every ballot is received in time to be counted, even in the most rural and remote areas of my state.

CISA, Department of Homeland Security and other federal partners have been vital, not only on the cyber security front but also with physical security. Physical and cyber security assessments help state and county election officials identify possible vulnerabilities and protect critical election infrastructure.

But there is still more that we could do on the federal level to support the hardworking Americans who run our elections. HAVA funds, as I have mentioned personally to members of this committee and its staff, continue to be intermittent and wholly insufficient to provide predictable and sustained support that local jurisdictions require. It is these local jurisdictions that run our federal elections with federal candidates on federal ballots under federal rules without any sustained and predictable federal support. It is concerning that currently there does not appear to be any HAVA funding in the next federal budget.

I am deeply grateful to Senator Klobuchar for introducing S.1, the Freedom to Vote Act, which includes provisions to protect election workers and administrators. I urge Congress to move forward with this important legislation without delay.

Also, as this esteemed body continues to debate how to fund the federal government, I especially implore you to take whatever steps necessary to ensure that there are no disruptions in the vital election security services that administrators, like those in Arizona and across the nation, rely on to guard against emerging threats. Specifically, I encourage you to designate CISA's Physical Security and Cyber Security Agents as critical employees as they are on the ground daily, performing the essential work necessary to maintain the critical infrastructure of election administration.

Conclusion

Threats to American Democracy are real, and American election administrators from across the nation are rising up to meet these challenges. But we cannot do this alone. Now, more than ever, we need a sustained and robust Congressional commitment to support our efforts in protecting the democracy that upholds our great republic against the threats we all face.

Arizona is prepared for the 2024 Presidential Election Cycle. But we need you, not just your HAVA dollars, but your continued support of our federal partners, including EAC and CISA, and legislative action supporting S.1 to protect our election workers. With this Congressional assistance, we can prepare current and future generations of Election Heroes.

Thank you again for the invitation to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.