



Statement from the Honorable John H. Merrill
Alabama Secretary of State

Before the Committee on House Administration

U.S. House of Representatives

May 8, 2019
Washington, D.C.

Chairperson Lofgren, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to discuss election administration and cybersecurity.

My name is John Merrill, and I am Alabama's 53rd Secretary of State.

Alabamians have an extraordinary amount of experience with effective and ineffective election administration. At one time, our laws were written to reduce or eliminate minority participation in the electoral process. My team and I work diligently each and every day to ensure that the right to vote and the opportunity to receive a free, government-issued photo ID are extended to each and every eligible Alabamian that is a resident of our state.

Since I have been the Secretary of State, we have broken every record in the history of the state for voter registration and voter participation, and I will get to those numbers in a moment, but I think that it is essential to impress upon this committee, members of the body, and my fellow citizens of the United States, that we cannot solve one crisis by pretending it is another. We must work collectively to strengthen our Cyber Security to protect the integrity of the electoral system from foreign influence; however, we should not present a narrative to citizens that only one system can ensure an equal right to vote.

As I have previously stated, my goal as Alabama's 53rd Secretary of State is to ensure that each and every eligible U.S. Citizen that is a resident of Alabama is registered to vote and receives a photo ID.

During my time as Alabama's Secretary of State, my team and I have changed the paradigm for voting in the State of Alabama. Since, January 19, 2015, we have worked with notable Alabamians, local officials, interested agencies, key communicators, and concerned citizens to encourage voter registration and voter participation. The results are that we have registered 1,249,442 new voters, which brings our total number of registered voters to 3,479,068. Thirty of our 67 counties use electronic poll books, which expedites the check-in process and offers greater security for the voter and greater efficiencies and accountability for the poll worker. Our stated goal is to have electronic poll books in every county in the state by 2022. As a part of our efforts to ensure voter integrity, we have worked to secure six convictions of criminal activity related to voter fraud and will continue to document, investigate, and prosecute those individuals' intent on disrupting our democratic institutions for personal or political gain.

We have created Alabama's first braille Alabama Voter's Guide and offer applications for absentee ballot printed in braille. In 2016, we created a committee to author and pass legislation to make it easier to regain the right to vote after being convicted of a disqualifying felony, and my legislative team is working with Alabama State Senator Rodger Smitherman, a democrat, to pass legislation to make it easier for Alabamians to cast an absentee ballot. Including those Alabamians who are incarcerated but not convicted of a disqualifying felony conviction, while they are incarcerated.

Our Director of Elections is working with a team of election analysts and other third-party groups to build an active pilot program to test the most effective manner in which our state should conduct post-election audits. We have worked to secure election systems that connect to

our state and local networks for some form of internet connectivity. We have expanded the training provided by the Secretary of State's Office to local election officials to include cybersecurity and how to handle the increased cyber threat in the world today.

All these efforts have helped our citizens become more involved and engaged in the process to elect officials that represent them in local, state, and federal positions. We have broken every record in the history of the state for voter participation, as Alabamians have turned out to vote in record numbers. In March of 2016, we set a record for voter participation in a presidential preference primary with 1.25 million Alabamians casting a ballot. In the General Election on November 8, 2016, 2.1 million Alabamians cast a ballot. Alabama then broke the record for participation in a Special Election during the 2017 U.S. Senate Special Election, held on December 12, 2017, with 1.3 million Alabamians casting a ballot for their choice for the next U.S. Senator from Alabama. Most recently, we broke the record for turnout in a non-presidential general election year during the 2018 General Election with more than 1.7 million Alabamians going to the polls.

We have also worked with the Chief Election Official at the county level in Alabama, the Probate Judge, to ensure that unofficial Election Night Results are securely transmitted through encrypted channels to the Secretary of State's Office. Our team verifies the data submitted and then makes that available in real time to the public and members of the media. This system was built to withstand technical challenges, and during the 2017 Senate Special Election, our site was able to support more than 500,000 unique users at one time. The work we completed in advance of the election with our state and federal partners to ensure that the system was secure and could withstand DDoS and other similar cyber-attacks allowed Alabama to be prepared for both the threat from actors who wish to cause harm and the flood of users with an interest in the result of the election.

In Alabama, we are making it easy to vote and hard to cheat.

As we prepared for the 2018 General Election, we worked to ensure our systems were protected by requiring 2-Factor Authentication for any state or local user who accesses the voter registration system. We secured our networks and our election night reporting system with resources provided through the Department of Homeland Security, our local information systems team, and other third-party vendors. Our work to conduct elections efficiently and effectively is supported both by the Elections Assistance Commission and the Department of Homeland Security. The EAC provides guidance and support, as we prepare our local election officials to administer their elections. Our relationship with DHS is a relatively new one, but it is one that has been home to significant growth over the last two years. Prior to the Senate Special Election in December of 2017, we had very little interaction with DHS. However, as that election approached, we were able to work closely with DHS to ensure our systems were secure. We wanted to make sure that any vulnerabilities that we could identify were resolved and any new issues were mitigated before they disrupted an election in Alabama. We have also hosted a team from DHS onsite with us throughout Election Day to ensure issues are resolved in real time.

In closing, I think that it is imperative that the federal government learn from the bi-partisan nature of the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS). At the Annual Winter 2019

Meeting of NASS members, I was approached by Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, a Democrat, who presented the idea of hosting the Secretaries in Alabama for a tour of the historic sites located in our state, which tell the story of how Alabama and its citizens found themselves on the forefront of the fight for civil rights. That is why tomorrow begins a three-day tour, which begins in Birmingham, Alabama at the site of the 16th Street Baptist Church that was bombed September 15, 1963 during the peak of the Civil Rights Movement. We will then spend a day in Montgomery and a day in Selma visiting historic sites and studying the sacrifices made to ensure that all Americans are able to enjoy the right to vote.

As the state's chief election officials, we have an extraordinary amount of responsibility to ensure the integrity of the electoral process is secure and preserved. We have also seen that the most effective way to combat foreign influence in our elections systems is to work with our colleagues across the country to share information and to work together to ensure that our people can remain comfortable casting a ballot and confident in the results of the election.