



Trump signs legislation making hacking voting systems a federal crime

BY MAGGIE MILLER - 10/21/20 05:49 PM EDT

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President Trump has signed legislation making it a federal crime to attempt to hack federal voting systems.

The Defending the Integrity of Voting Systems Act was unanimously approved by the House last month, over a year after the Senate also unanimously passed the legislation. Trump signed the legislation on Tuesday, just two weeks before the election.

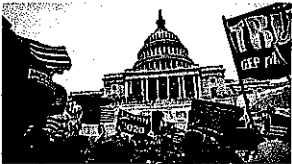
The new law empowers the Department of Justice (DOJ) to pursue charges against anyone who attempts to hack a voting system under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, commonly used by the agency to pursue charges against malicious hackers.

The bill's original introduction was the result of a 2018 report compiled by the DOJ's Cyber Digital Task Force, which evaluated ways the federal government could improve its response to cyber threats. The bipartisan bill was introduced by Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) last year.

Concerns around election security have remained high since 2016, when Russian agents launched a sweeping campaign to interfere in the U.S. presidential election. The effort included targeting voting infrastructure in all 50 states, with Russian hackers successfully gaining access to voter registration systems in several states.

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There is no evidence that any votes were changed in 2016 or that any voters were prevented from casting their ballots, though lawmakers and officials have pushed to avoid any repeat of the election interference from that year.

Blumenthal applauded the voting systems bill being signed into law in a statement provided to The Hill on Wednesday.

“Strong safeguards enacted by this law are necessary to protect our election systems against threats from foreign adversaries seeking to undermine our democracy,” Blumenthal said. “The Department of Justice will now be equipped with powerful tools to vigorously prosecute and stop malicious hackers attempting to hack our election infrastructure.”

“With just 13 days until Election Day, this law is critical and I am proud to have fought for its passage,” he added.

Election security has been a heated topic of debate on Capitol Hill over the past four years, with disagreements among Democrats and Republicans over if and how to intervene in order to secure elections following the 2016 Russian interference efforts.

Since 2018, Congress has appropriated more than \$800 million in election security funds to states, along with \$400 million in the CARES Act stimulus package approved in March to help states respond to new challenges to elections posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Election security concerns have remained high this year, with federal officials warning in recent months that countries including Russia, China and Iran are actively seeking to interfere in U.S. elections.

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Federal, state and local officials have significantly stepped up efforts to protect election systems against cybersecurity threats since 2016, particularly following the designation of election systems as critical infrastructure by former Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson in early 2017.

Christopher Krebs, the director of DHS's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency said in a lengthy statement Tuesday night that while "various actors" may attempt to sow chaos and confusion around the election process, federal authorities were confident about the security of the voting process.

“We’re now in the final stretch of the election and tens of millions of voters have already cast their votes free from foreign interference,” Krebs said. “We remain confident that no foreign cyber actor can change your vote, and we still believe that it would be incredibly difficult for them to change the outcome of an election at the national level.”

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