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Just the Facts: About Rigged Elections and Voter Fraud

By Jim Condos, Vermont Secretary of State

Recent unsupported allegations and sensationalized reporting are sowing seeds of doubt about our democratic process. This undermines voter confidence and calls into question whether all voices will be heard on November 8th.

As Vermont's Secretary of State and chief elections officer, former State Senator, former City Councilor, and lifelong voter, I've been following our elections my entire adult life. I am frustrated by the careless way in which these stories attack our very democracy. They show a real lack of understanding of the true risks.

I'd like to set the record straight.

Vermont's elections will not be "rigged" and "voter fraud" is essentially non-existent here and across the U.S. In fact, a Loyola University study by constitutional law professor Justin Levitt found just 31 instances of *potential* voter fraud between 2000 and 2014. According to Levitt, more than 1 BILLION ballots (local, state, federal) were cast in that period.

Vermont's elections process is nonpartisan, transparent and decentralized to the town level. Any hacking or altering of results would require a conspiracy on a massive scale.

I can assure Vermonters we have taken every precaution to insure our elections are secure. I'm confident my elections team, our IT security staff, law enforcement, and local election officials will continue to protect the integrity of our electoral process.

I have faith in our system, and you should too. Here's why:

- Vermont's Election process is decentralized – to the local level. Someone trying to influence or change an election would have to hack into *each* town's vote tabulators.
- Our tabulators are not connected to each other, the internet or any other software – either hard-wired or wireless.
- It has been suggested that the memory cards (MCs) in these machines could be tampered with, but from the time the MCs are delivered, 2-4 weeks before the election, the clerks are instructed to keep them secure. As long as the MC is stored securely, it cannot be manipulated.
- 10-14 days before the election, the clerks complete a logic & accuracy test on the MCs.
- Vermont requires a paper ballot for our statewide elections. That ballot is sealed, secured and stored for 22 months after each statewide election.

- After each General election, we randomly audit several towns to insure results are accurate.

Another story that makes for great headlines is the risk of cyberattacks.

Are we vulnerable? There is always a risk and there will always be vulnerabilities, but the risk has been overstated. There are only two confirmed cases of successful hacking in other states, and those breaches were of voter registration databases having nothing to do with election results.

In Vermont, we have taken many precautions to secure our systems and data including a cyber risk assessment, penetration test, and firewalls. We are on high alert and in contact with federal law enforcement to identify and respond to any threats as they arise.

I have faith in our hard-working city/town clerks, local elections officials, and volunteer poll workers who conduct Vermont's elections. We work directly with those individuals, providing training, supplies, and other support.

They appreciate voting and cherish it as a fundamental right. They know what it means for democracy and are passionate about ensuring free and fair elections and careful, accurate results. To say that elections will be "rigged" or "hacked" or voter fraud is "very common" ignores the facts and insults their integrity.

Regrettably, the more harmful effect of casting unfounded aspersions is to rattle our confidence and prevent us from voting or trusting the outcome of those votes - a direct attack on democracy. That should concern us all, making us even more determined not to allow such threats to work.

I'm confident in our democratic process and how we have secured our elections. While there will always be vulnerabilities and risks, Vermonters should know they can go to the polls on November 8th and cast their ballots with the full expectation that their votes will be counted and their voices will be heard.

Remember, Your Vote is Your Voice!

Jim Condos is Vermont's Secretary of State. Vermont's voter registration deadline is November 2 @ 5PM. Register by visiting your town clerk or online at www.olvr.sec.state.vt.us.

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