



Remarks by Secretary of State Pedro A. Cortés
Press Conference, Capitol Media Center, Harrisburg, PA
October 20, 2016

Thank you for being here.

Voting is one of our most fundamental rights as citizens. We must ensure that all eligible voters who want to exercise their franchise can do so well informed about the process and their rights.

Governor Wolf and I strongly believe that one of our roles as public servants is to encourage as many people as possible to engage in the electoral process and exercise their right to vote and have a say in what happens in their municipality, county, state and nation.

Unfortunately, in recent weeks, some have decided to take a different approach. Some have suggested that our system lacks integrity and security. Some have suggested that fraud is rampant and election officials at the local and state level have nefarious motives.

This is not only wrong and uninformed – it is dangerous. To imply that fraud is rampant – at any level – from the precinct-level to an entire city or state – is without merit and lacks any credence or proof within the modern history of elections in this country or commonwealth.

It is also not backed up by any science or research. To the contrary, a study by Loyola University looked at one billion votes – a billion – and found just 31 unrelated and small-scale examples of improper activity.

Applying singular, unconnected and rare instances of fraud to claim a widespread conspiracy is irresponsible and destructive to the democratic process. Efforts to suppress voting or seek for citizens to call into question the value of their participation is counter to our core values of freedom and liberty. A good democracy hinges on well-informed voters and all of us have an obligation to speak about this process with honesty and objectivity.

I want to applaud my colleagues across the state and country who are speaking out on these outrageous claims. Both Democrats, Republicans and non-partisans have rejected conspiracy theorizing and put our democracy above politics.

Philadelphia City Commissioner Al Schmidt, a Republican, who said: "The real threat to the integrity of elections in Philadelphia isn't voter fraud, though it does rarely occur. The real threat to the integrity of elections is irresponsible accusations that undermine confidence in the electoral process."

Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted, a Republican, said there are "many safeguards in place in our election system" and that "this kind of conversation moves America backward, and it should be dismissed. Don't make people feel despair. Make them feel uplifted, and hopeful that there is a better day ahead for all of us."

I am here today to deliver the same message to the people of Pennsylvania. Our voting systems are secure and historically we have seen very, very minimal improper activity, so little that it is statistically non-existent. The people who oversee our elections take pride in ensuring the system is fair and accountable, from our staff at the Department of State to county election workers to poll-workers in the more than 9,100 precincts across Pennsylvania.

To suggest that these hardworking public servants are participating in something nefarious is not just unfair – it is offensive to me. I am proud of the hard work done by our state and county election officials to protect and promote the democratic process.

I take this very, very seriously. Those who run our elections at the local and precinct level come from every walk of life and include people of every gender, creed, and ethnicity. To demean their efforts is unacceptable and I want to reassure any of them who may be nervous about working this election that the counties and my department will do everything we can to ensure they can work without interruption, fear or undue stress.

Now I want to address a few other issues that have arisen in the last few weeks:

Voting Systems

The Pennsylvania Department of State and Pennsylvania's 67 county election boards work diligently to safeguard and promote the integrity of elections in the Commonwealth.

All of the voting systems in use in Pennsylvania have been examined and certified to federal and state standards. These standards include an audit capability independent from the way in which the votes are tabulated on election night. There is in fact an audit trail.

The voting systems used in Pennsylvania are also equipped with redundant memory, meaning that cast vote records are encrypted and stored in at least one other location on the voting machine in addition to being stored on the removable media.

Voting machines in Pennsylvania are not connected to the Internet. In fact, they are not even connected to one another.

In addition, voting machines are kept under a strict chain of custody. Prior to every election the machines are tested for logic and accuracy. After successful testing, the machines are locked down and physical tapes/locks are applied that would detect equipment tampering. Furthermore, the voting machines are kept separate from the tabulation equipment.

On Election Day, a zero tape is run on every machine to ensure they do not contain prior votes. This is done in the presence of poll workers and watchers.

Once the polls close, a physical tally of votes is run for every machine and posted at the polling place. A copy of that paper tally is also included with the electronic memory card for each machine, which are transported to the county board of elections in individual security/tamper proof bags.

Election night reporting of unofficial results takes place using the Commonwealth's secured network. Pennsylvania is a recognized leader among states in cybersecurity.

In addition to the Commonwealth cybersecurity tool and procedures, the Commonwealth has partnered with federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, to ensure the integrity of our systems and networks.

The Department of State and the counties take very seriously their responsibility to ensure fair, secure and smooth elections. We are confident the November election will meet those high standards; as it has been the case in years past.

Poll-watching

The Department of State is committed to ensuring that elections run as smoothly and fairly as possible. In recent weeks, poll-watching has been widely discussed and I want to reaffirm the guidelines for who can be in the polling place. Those people are:

1. Precinct Election Officials. These include the Judge of Election, the Inspectors (Majority and Minority), appointed clerks and machine operators.
2. Voters in the process of voting but no more than 10 voters at a time.
3. Persons lawfully providing assistance to voters.
4. Overseers that are registered voters of the precinct appointed by a County judge
5. Constables and Deputy Constables for preserving the peace.
6. And Poll watchers

Poll watchers must be identified in advance and assigned to specific precincts. Watchers receive a credential from the county Board of Elections and must present the credential upon demand.

Each party is entitled to appoint three watchers per precinct and each candidate is entitled to appoint two watchers per precinct. The watcher must be a registered voter of the county in which the watcher is appointed.

Watchers may not engage voters or otherwise interfere with the orderly process of voting. Watchers should direct all challenges and other comments directly to the Judge of Elections who is the official in charge at the polling place.

Voter Intimidation

Voter intimidation and discriminatory conduct is illegal under federal and Pennsylvania law. Any activity that threatens, harasses or intimidates voters, including any activity that is intended to, or has the effect of, interfering with any voter's right to vote, whether it occurs outside the polling place or inside the polling place is illegal.

It is illegal for any person or corporation to directly or indirectly practice intimidation or coercion through the use of force, violence, restraint, or threats in order to induce or compel a person to vote or refrain from voting for a particular candidate or on a particular political issue.

Further, it is illegal for a person or corporation to use abduction, duress, coercion, or any other forcible or fraudulent means to impede, prevent or otherwise interfere with a person's right to vote.

Individuals who intimidate voters can be fined up to \$5,000 and face up to two years in prison.

I have full faith in our law enforcement officers, working in concert with election workers, to protect voters and ensure no citizen is terrorized or intimidated in their pursuit of their civic duty.

Individuals who witness voter intimidation or who are victims of voter intimidation should report the incident to their County Board of Elections and County District Attorney.

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That is the conclusion of my prepared remarks and I would be happy to take your questions. I just want to reiterate the faith, confidence and respect that I have for our county, local and precinct election workers who are among some of the best public servants I have ever met. We are committed to delivering a fair, secure and smooth election for the people of Pennsylvania and the nation.