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## Hawaii News

# State election officials boost vigilance in wake of attacks

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With Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump complaining about a rigged election and online hackers reportedly attacking at least 20 state voter registration rolls, Hawaii election officials are stepping up their vigilance against possible voter shenanigans.

While Hawaii's election system has yet to be hacked, the state Office of Elections has been in contact with the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI about additional security procedures, said Nedielyn Bueno, the office's voter services section head.

Bueno wouldn't say what measures were recommended by the federal authorities — only that some of the advice is already being followed here.

She said officials are confident that the appropriate security is in place to prevent any manipulation, disruption or fraud.

"Is there no voter fraud?" state Elections Commission Chairman F.M. Scotty Anderson said. "There isn't a state that can make that claim."

But Anderson said the reality is there's little chance of election sabotage here.

No voting machines are connected to the internet, he said, and ballots cast on Election Day are scanned and stored on memory cards, which are in turn transmitted at the end of the day to the Statewide Counting Center at the state Capitol.

Bueno said the state works with the political parties to allow observers to man each poll, as well as the Statewide Counting Center, to guard against fraud.

In addition, the state's more than 900 voting machines were tested by election officials with political party observers earlier this month to see whether they were functioning correctly, she said, while the absentee vote counting scanners, which tabulate the mail-in ballots, will be tested this week.

Meanwhile, each mail-in ballot is checked manually to make sure signatures match the ones on file for each voter. Cross-checking Social Security numbers, identification and signatures at the polls adds to the security, officials said.

As for the state's online voter registration list, it has received an extra layer of security with recent upgrades to the state computer network, said Keith DeMello, spokesman for the state Office of Enterprise Technology Services.

More upgrades are on the way, DeMello said, as the state Legislature approved the hiring of three new cybersecurity positions, including a chief information security officer responsible for making sure the state stays current with best practices in security, and two support positions that, among other things, will search out vulnerabilities in the network.

### **Confidence in security**

Election security has become a hot topic nationally following a series of suspected Russian hacks of Democratic groups, party officials and at least two state election networks.

The FBI in August issued a nationwide alert warning states of possible hacking of state election offices following cyber-penetrations in Illinois and Arizona, and attempts on 18 other state systems. Some federal officials have implicated Russia in the attacks.

Trump has elevated the national conversation with a recent drumbeat of assertions that the election will be "rigged."

However, many experts say it's next to impossible to manipulate a presidential election, given the wide-ranging electoral systems employed across the United States, most of them with voting machines that are not connected to the internet.

The reality, they say, is that it would take a vast and coordinated effort by an entity within the country to generate a bogus election outcome.

Fritz Rohlfing, chairman of the Republican Party of Hawaii, said that with procedures and protocols in place, he's confident in the integrity of Hawaii's voting system and "as long as we do our job" monitoring the event.

"We always have to be vigilant, and we put a lot of effort into it," he said.

Rohlfing said the party's goal is to have one volunteer at every polling place, and three or four people watching the proceedings at the main counting center in Honolulu.

Rohlfing said a bigger concern may be whether enough ballots will be available at the polls. He pointed out that the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled against the Elections Office in July, saying the issue deserves to be addressed by formal public rule-making rather than internal decision-making.

The Green Party of Hawaii sued Chief Election Officer Scott Nago following the 2012 general election, asking for new rules to prevent a replay of what happened when 24 precincts ran out of ballots on Election Day, resulting in long lines and some who walked away without voting.

Despite attempts to rush additional ballots to the precincts, at least 57 voters were denied the right to vote, according to the suit.

"The minority party always has to pay attention and be alert at every level," Rohlfing said.

Although formal rule-making has yet to occur, Bueno said there should be plenty of ballots this year as about a million of them have been printed out.

Keli'i Akina, president of the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii, said his organization has seen no evidence of widespread voter fraud in Hawaii.

However, he said that does not negate the need for vigilance and measures to ensure that only those entitled to vote do so.

"What citizens should be aware of is the problem that arises from the lack of balance between political parties," said Akina, who is also seeking election to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. "Because this is virtually a one-party state, there is less capacity for second and third parties to play a watchdog role. The lack of balance invites corruption and complacency, both of which can influence the electoral process."

Anderson, the Election Commission chairman, said he plans to lobby state lawmakers to switch to all mail-in voting. Not only will it save \$800,000 each year, but it will enhance election security by allowing officials to check signatures to ensure authenticity, he said.

But Rohlfing said he doesn't believe election security will be served by all mail-in, adding that too many dirty tricks and manipulation can happen when the voting takes place away from the polling place.

"I have more faith in Election Day balloting," he said.

As for the upcoming election, U.S. Attorney Florence Nakakuni announced the appointment of Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Nammar as election officer

responsible for overseeing the Hawaii District's handling of complaints of election fraud and voting rights abuses.

Nammar will be on duty while the polls are open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 8. If you see any problems, he can be reached at 541-2850.