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Secretary of State Alex Padilla Notified by DHS of Unsuccessful Russian Attempt to Target 2016 Election

SACRAMENTO – California Secretary of State Alex Padilla was informed today by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security of Russian “scanning” in 2016 of California’s Internet-facing systems. Secretary Padilla released the following statement:

“Today, my office was informed for the first time by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that “Russian cyber actors” “scanned” California’s Internet-facing systems in 2016. DHS confirmed that they have no evidence that any systems were penetrated or compromised in any way. Scanning is an unauthorized attempt to identify weaknesses in a computer or network – akin to a burglar looking for unlocked doors in a house.”

“Our office actively monitors scanning activity as part of our routine cyber security protocols. We have no information or evidence that our systems have been breached in any way or that any voter information was compromised.”

“We are concerned, however, that in June 2017, Jeanette Manfra, Acting Undersecretary for Cybersecurity and Communications at DHS testified before the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee that “the owners of the systems within those 21 states have been notified.” This was simply not true and DHS acknowledged they failed to contact us and “two or three” other states.”

“It is completely unacceptable that it has taken DHS over a year to inform our office of Russian scanning of our systems, despite our repeated requests for information. The practice of withholding critical information from elections officials is a detriment to the security of our elections and our democracy.”

“In a letter I sent to Admiral Michael S. Rogers of the National Security Agency (NSA) earlier this year in June, I expressed serious concern about the NSA’s failure to provide timely and critical information to America’s elections officials. We shouldn’t have to learn about potential threats from leaked NSA documents or media reports. It is the intelligence community’s responsibility to inform elections officials of any potential threats to our elections. They failed in this responsibility.”

“I will continue to demand that our intelligence agencies be forthcoming with timely and actionable information relating to cyber security threats. I call on Congress to hold our intelligence agencies accountable to ensure they handle critical information with the urgency and transparency that elections officials and our democracy deserve.”

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