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PRESS RELEASE

Secretary of State Jim Condos Statement on DHS Designating Elections Systems as “Critical Infrastructure”

Montpelier – Protecting election integrity and security is one of my most important duties of the Secretary of State. It’s a sacred responsibility and is something I take seriously. This includes cybersecurity. My office has been taking steps to prepare for growing cyber threats for some time. We hired independent experts to perform cybersecurity assessments of all of our systems. Based on those results, we further fortified our defenses and put appropriate proactive protections in place. We continually monitor, assess and secure all of our systems, including our elections systems. Deputy Secretary Winters attended the first ever conference of the National Cybersecurity Center in November to help raise awareness about the seriousness of the problem and to stay on top of the latest threats. Cybersecurity discussions must come out of the server room and into the board room for all state agencies.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has declared elections infrastructure as “critical infrastructure.” We have been working with (DHS) since before the November election and have partnered with them to supplement our existing cyber hygiene scans and other preventative measures. We continue to work with DHS on a regular basis as part of our overall cybersecurity approach. It has not yet been made fully clear to us what the critical designation means and, through the National Association of Secretaries of State, have posed a number of clarifying questions we had hoped would be answered prior to the declaration on Friday. We have been told that this designation does not place any mandates on us and would vigorously resist any move to place elections under control of the federal government. As soon as we receive more information and have assessed the situation, we will have a more detailed statement.

Though I am cautiously optimistic but skeptical of this designation, of one thing I am sure: I welcome any additional attention this brings to the importance of elections and protecting our most fundamental democratic right: the right to vote. If this declaration furthers our overall goal of protecting elections without compromising the safeguard of local, decentralized control, we will gladly continue using the additional DHS help in our comprehensive approach to preserving election integrity.

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