

Russian meddlers skip Brevard's elections infrastructure; cybersecurity measures upgraded continually, says Elections Supervisor

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Brevard County Supervisor of Elections Lori Scott confirmed that the county escaped the interest of any foreign meddlers but added that her office was continually working to bolster its cybersecurity. FILE. (Photo: TIM SHORTT/FLORIDA TODAY)

The mystery of which two Florida counties had their election databases infiltrated by Russian hackers apparently does not include Brevard County.

Brevard County Supervisor of Elections Lori Scott confirmed that the county escaped the interest of any foreign meddlers but added that her office was continually working to bolster its cybersecurity.

“Brevard never received any (phishing email), nor were we targeted,” Scott said. “I’m kind of surprised because we are one of the 10 largest counties in the state. As for our cybersecurity, we’ve have been working with the Department of Homeland Security, the

FBI and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement,” Scott said Wednesday, noting that the nation’s elections systems – from the ballot box to internal email servers and voter databases – were deemed by federal authorities as part of the nation’s critical infrastructure.

"What this is about is undermining voter confidence," Scott said of the unidentified intrusions.

The critical infrastructure designation, made in 2017, means federal funding along with consultation and testing from security experts in order to safeguard the nation’s election system. Brevard – which had 284,971 people cast ballots in the last election – also received some federal funding to improve its internal systems.

Tuesday, Gov. Ron DeSantis revealed two counties in Florida – a key swing state in presidential elections going back to 2000 – were targeted by hackers during the 2016 presidential election, a fact laid out in the report compiled by Special Counsel Robert Mueller looking into Russian interference.

"I recently met with the FBI concerning the election issue mentioned in the Mueller report," said DeSantis at a news conference on Tuesday. "Two Florida counties experienced intrusion into the supervisor-of-election networks. There was no manipulation," said DeSantis, who met with federal investigators to discuss the breach.

The counties, however, were not named.

Scott said that her office has had several security experts review the email system, computer network and other infrastructure at the elections office. Suggestions were made, although Scott would not discuss what was needed for security reasons.

There are, however, training sessions on phishing, the use of fake emails used to glean information from the recipient, including passwords and personal information. The office's internal network is also monitored 24 hours a day.

Scott, who began serving in 2009, pointed out the actual voting system – which is based on tabulation – is not on a computer network and is also backed up with paper ballots.

“What we had to do, I’m not discussing with anyone. It’s an ongoing assessment,” she said. Scott pointed out that the hackers frequently work to change their methods.

“They’re getting smarter all the time. We have to be vigilant."

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