

TESTIMONY OF LYNN TAYLOR  
BEFORE THE ELECTIONS SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATION

MARCH 23, 2023

Chair Lee, Ranking Member Sewell, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lynn Taylor. I am the President of the Virginia Institute for Public Policy and, more importantly for this hearing today, I am the Chairman of the Virginia Fair Elections Coalition and the Election Integrity Network, a project of the Virginia Institute.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to set the record straight on a topic about which the media, partisan nonprofit organizations and, unfortunately, the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and other government agencies have been misleading the American people for the past two years: that is, that poll watchers in elections are somehow a ‘problem’ for the election system and election officials.

Let me be clear about one singularly important point: citizen observers and poll watchers are a fundamental and vital part of the election process, and the involvement of citizens is the ONLY way to restore the confidence of the American people in the truth and honesty of our elections.

The laws of 48 states, and those of the District of Columbia, specifically recognize poll watchers or observers as a statutory component of the state’s election system. Only Oregon and West Virginia have no statutory provisions for poll watchers. State laws describe who appoints poll observers, what their roles are, what the observers can do or not do, and what they are allowed to observe. Poll watchers are an integral part of the election codes of virtually every state in the nation.

Federal law also recognizes the importance of poll observers, imposing criminal penalties against any person who “... , by force or threat of force willfully injures, intimidates or interferes with, or attempts to injure, intimidate or interfere with-(1) any person ... acting as a poll watcher. 18 USC 245(b)(1)(a)

Notwithstanding the role of poll watchers embedded in state and federal law, for the past two years, there has been a steady drumbeat of the media, the current

administration, and partisan organizations advancing the false narrative that citizen poll watchers are unnecessary and even a ‘threat to democracy.’

The truth and reality of the matter is that citizen poll watchers are a key component in **protecting** our Republic.

Following the 2020 presidential election, citizens all over America found themselves looking at that general election, and asking “what has happened to our election systems?”

America used to have an election DAY, not an election month or two months. Voters would cast their ballots in person in their local precincts, not in giant voting centers. Then, at the end of election night, there was reconciliation at the precinct and then the county and then the state to ensure that the number of votes matched to the number of ballots and voters recorded as having voted. Ballots had to be received by the time the polls closed on election day. People voted in person at polling places (unless there was a good reason requiring absence from the polling place) and prohibitions against political influence and intimidation were in place to protect voters at the polls. The voting process was supervised by election workers and observers from both political parties who watched the process – and each other – to make certain that the election was transparent and adhered to the law.

After Election Day in 2020, Americans realized that all of those provisions – and more – had changed. Without much fanfare, over the preceding decade, and with funding from partisan billionaires and foundations, the system of voting had been transformed to one that is largely unsupervised, where laws are routinely disregarded, and the system had evolved to allow the direct manipulation of election offices in 2020 by partisan political operatives funded by special interests targeting select cities and counties in key states.

And the American people took notice.

In Virginia, where I serve as President of the Virginia Institute for Public Policy, election integrity advocates and leaders gathered to analyze the election systems in our state. We began to coalesce in 2021 into local task forces led by citizen volunteers and we formed the Virginia Fair Elections Coalition – the VFE – which I chair. The coalition began meeting weekly in 2021 and continues today, as we recruit, train and deploy concerned citizens from across the Commonwealth of

Virginia to become involved as volunteer election observers and leaders – not just at election time, but year-in and year-out.

Virginia’s election system has been upended by ‘reforms’ enacted by the Democrat-controlled General Assembly where we now have 45 days of early voting, no voter identification, same day registration, and a constant push for unsupervised voting by mail. It is not a system that inspires confidence in the integrity of the outcome.

But VFE’s members determined in 2021 that we were not going to whine over what had happened with the changes in our laws – and we would do whatever we could to protect the integrity of the election in spite of the laws that took away transparency in our election processes.

We determined that the way we could restore transparency was by focusing on recruiting, training, and deploying poll observers to cover as many shifts as possible beginning with the first day of early voting in September 2021.

And that is exactly what we did. In 2021 alone, ~4,500 Virginians were trained who covered an unprecedented 85% of the 14,000 shifts necessary for a 45-day election season.

What did those observers do? They observed. They worked. They watched. They documented. And they saw issues and problems that they helped to resolve, both before and after voting began.

For example: one local task force noticed boxes of ‘returned mail’ at the local election office and asked what it was. They were informed by the Registrar’s office that these were the letters sent out by the Registrar to voters at their registration addresses that had been returned ‘undeliverable’.

Those volunteers came back to the VFE weekly call, reported what they had found and asked, “what is supposed to be done with those undeliverable addresses?” Our Virginia elections law expert, a former state electoral board member, advised that that information is required by state law to be entered into the voter database and a voter whose letter is returned undeliverable becomes inactive and must take action in order to cast a ballot. [It is one of the few integrity requirements that the General Assembly had missed when it took a wrecking ball to the Virginia Election Code.]

The volunteers returned to the Registrar's office, armed with the statute and informed the Registrar what the law required – and the Registrar said he had no idea about this law – and instructed the staff to start entering the information into the voter database as the statute required.

Our motto is **Be Right, Be Polite.**

Our goal is to assist election administrators in complying with state law and to do so in a congenial and cooperative manner. And we have found that many times, failure to adhere to the law is not nefarious or intentional – but is a result of innocent mistakes or failure to be aware of statutory requirements. We are frequently thanked for bringing these oversights to officials' attention. And not surprisingly, members of our coalitions have become Electoral Board members because they have also become experts.

Since 2021, VFE has continued to grow and we now have local election integrity task forces representing approximately 60% of Virginia's counties and nine state issue-specific working groups.

Starting in 2022, we worked with the Conservative Partnership Institute to create a national effort, using the Virginia Model: building statewide election integrity coalitions with local task forces in as many counties and cities as possible. As of February 1, 2023, the Election Integrity Network (EIN) is now a project of the Virginia Institute and I serve as the Network's national chairman. Currently, the Network has 17 active statewide coalitions that meet regularly, along with a leadership council whose members collaborate and share best practices across state lines. In addition, EIN hosts and manages eight national working groups on topics such as cleaning voter rolls, understanding election technology, protecting vulnerable voters, observing mail voting and the role of the United States Postal Service in our elections, and more.

Our goal is to engage every citizen in America in the election process – regardless of their political party or ideology. We are committed to educating them about how the system is supposed to work and how we, as citizens, can ensure that elections are conducted in a lawful and transparent manner. And we believe that if you don't like the election laws in your state, you should focus on the state legislature to make the changes – rather than the sue and settle program followed during the years leading up to the 2020 election where partisan legal groups

achieved changes in the law from activist judges and progressive state officials who refused to defend the laws enacted by the legislatures.

Our engagement over the past two years has brought hysterical attacks from “Big Media” on behalf of partisan activist groups and organizations. We have been attacked by many liberal media outlets in the country, calling us names and seeking to intimidate and harass the more than 90,000 citizen volunteers who have become engaged in helping to protect and save our elections.

Before U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland defined parents attending school board meetings as ‘domestic terrorists’; he and FBI Director Chris Wray had set up their ‘election official threats’ national hotline in June of 2021, presumably to protect election officials and administrators from citizens engaging as election observers and activists.

Do not misunderstand me: we do not now and never have and never will condone ANY hostility, threats, attacks, or anger against election officials by any person. We make a very strong point of teaching volunteers NEVER to lose their temper with or to harass any election official, worker, or employee.

As I said earlier, our mantra is “Be Right, Be Polite”.

But despite our determination that citizen engagement be civil at all times, the partisan organizations and leaders who have long held the election offices for themselves, came unglued. They have been relentless in attacking and disparaging our efforts to train and involve citizens as poll observers across the nation.

Neal Kelly, former Orange County (California) registrar, announced the formation of the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections, comprised of law enforcement personnel, election officials, several partisan nonprofits, and representatives from the EAC and Department of Homeland Security (DHS), among others, assembled to protect election officials from attacks and intimidation.

National meetings of election officials and Secretaries of State for the past two years, and including this year, featured and continue to feature programs and panels discussing the threats to elections by citizen observers and volunteers.

What happened in 2022? Was there chaos at the polls caused by volunteer poll watchers? No, there wasn’t. The predicted problems did not occur. But that has

not stopped the narrative. As recently as the national election officials meetings in February, Mr. Kelly suggested that election officials submit lists of their election workers to DHS to be ‘vetted’ prior to being allowed to serve as poll observers. Note that this is the same agency that established the misinformation, disinformation ‘curating’ entity, which included as a focus those who believe there are problems with our elections.

The result of the DOJ / FBI hotline for reporting threats to election officials, according to the testimony presented by the DOJ to the Senate Judiciary Committee in August of 2022, after more than a year of operations, was that approximately 1,100 reports of ‘hostile contacts’ with election officials were investigated. Of those, nearly 90% were deemed to NOT be threats and the reports almost always were protected citizen engagement and questions to election offices containing no threats of violence. Further, according to the DOJ report last August, the number of individual investigations is less than 5% of the total number of reported contacts. And of the four cases where there have been indictments or criminal charges, NONE of those related in any way to threats from poll watchers. NONE of them.

So why is there still ANY negativity toward citizen poll watchers, where this is a statutorily recognized and protected civic duty and there have been zero instances of criminal threats to election officials by poll watchers?

When will the DOJ, Mr. Kelly, “Big Media” and others admit they were wrong? When will they publicly acknowledge that citizens engaged in the election process as poll watchers are a positive force for our elections and do not constitute a ‘threat to democracy’.

The tiny number of bad actors are not any part of the organized efforts of the Election Integrity Network’s citizen election integrity efforts. Period.

Despite the facts, our volunteers are decried, demeaned, and attacked as somehow engaging in unwelcome or improper activities merely by fulfilling a civic duty outlined in state and federal law.

Another important point is this: citizen engagement in our elections is here to stay. We, the people, are not going away. For far too long, we have allowed

those employed by election offices and partisan nonprofits to control the election ecosphere. No more.

We are in this election apparatus and we plan to continue being engaged in the process no matter how many insults are hurled our way.

We as citizens believe that citizen observers belong in the election offices, as recognized by the laws of virtually every state.

On behalf of the EIN, VFE, and the thousands of volunteers across this nation, we are dedicated to saving our elections so they are fair, honest, and comply with applicable law.

We are committed to growing our network, making our elections transparent, and ensuring accountability of election officials to conduct the elections in such a manner that at the end of the election, all voters, all candidates, and all parties can be confident that whether their preferred candidate won or lost, the election system itself was fair to all and the results can be trusted.

The greatest challenge to our Constitutional Republic is loss of confidence in the election system by the people of this country.

Our mission is to keep that from happening so that our Republic and our nation can survive for another 250 years.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. I am happy to answer your questions.

###