

WASHINGTON – Efforts to establish standards to guide the development and implementation of modern voting systems throughout the United States have made significant progress, but still have a way to go, according to a joint hearing of the Committee on House Administration and the House Science Committee Wednesday.

“We need to continue to increase the accuracy and reliability of our nation’s voting systems and ensure that everyone one who wishes to vote and is eligible to vote has their vote counted,” said House Administration Chairman Vernon J. Ehlers, R-Michigan. “We must also ensure that there is no fraudulent voting so that legitimate votes are not negated by wrongdoers.”

The hearing, chaired by Ehlers – who also sits on the Science Committee where he chairs the Subcommittee on Environment, Technology and Standards – included testimony from a range of voting experts about the Voluntary Voting Systems Guidelines (VVSG) developed in accordance with the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). The guidelines are being developed with guidance from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) for final consideration by the Election Assistance Commission. The initial set of standards was approved by the EAC in December 2005 and go into effect in December 2007, although some states have already incorporated them.

“The creation of the 2005 Voluntary Voting Systems Guidelines was an important step in improving voting standards, but the usefulness of the guidelines in ensuring honest and fair elections will only be demonstrated by their adoption and implementation in the states,” Ehlers said. “Also, NIST still needs to approve test protocols at companies that will certify that voting systems meet the guidelines.”

Ehlers said the testimony from the witnesses – EAC Commissioner Donetta Davidson, NIST Director William Jeffrey, Minnesota Secretary of State Mary Kiffmeyer, Maryland State Administrator of Elections Linda Lamone, University of California-Berkeley computer science professor David Wagner, and John Groh, chairman of the Election Technology Association – made it clear that progress has been made since the 2000 elections, but that there is more to be done.

“The current VVSG is good as far as it goes, but it needs to be evaluated after the next election to see how the equipment functioned and what would be better,” said Kiffmeyer, who

noted that Minnesota has already implemented the guidelines. "Any necessary changes need to be made with an emphasis on software changes and hardware security changes first."

"It is important to consider the VVSG as a long-term strategy to improve voting systems in the United States," Lamone added. "These guidelines cannot be viewed as a panacea with an immediate and dramatic impact on elections; their impact will be gradual and will not be known for several election cycles."

"It is clear that we have more work to do on the standards and there is more work for the manufacturers of these systems," concluded Ehlers, who announced the House Administration Committee would have additional hearings on this topic in September. "But I am pleased with the progress we have made."