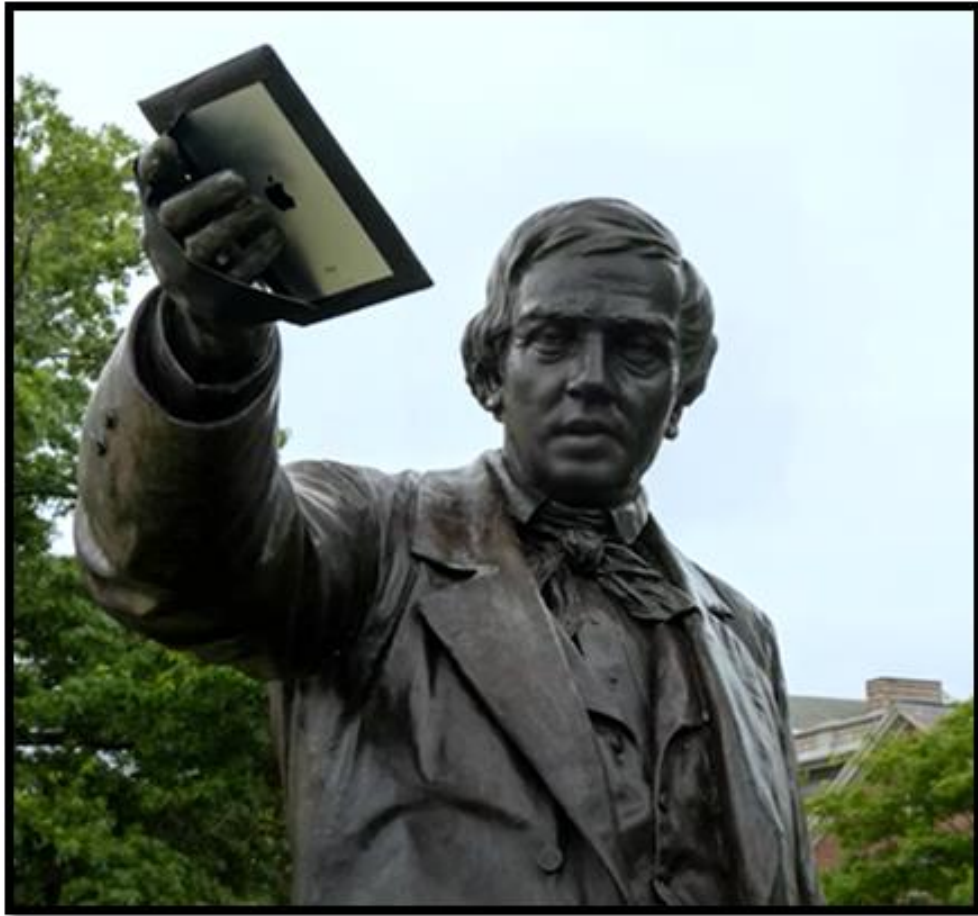


2025 NASS IDEAS Award Nomination



Project Title: Historical Statues Can No Longer Stay Silent: Promoting Cybersecurity as a Civic Responsibility

Submitted by: New Hampshire Secretary of State David M. Scanlan

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Subject Area: Elections

Project description: As the administrator of elections in New Hampshire, the Secretary of State is responsible for ensuring elections are transparent, fair, and conducted with integrity. In recent years, the use of artificial intelligence has become more prominent, increasing concerns among election officials about its use to deceive voters and disrupt elections. The New Hampshire Secretary of State, with funding from the Homeland Election Security Grant and with assistance from IDEEUH Media, produced three educational videos that teach New Hampshire voters the importance of cybersecurity and civic responsibility. These videos bring to life prominent Granite Staters such as Daniel Webster, John Stark, and others to provide New Hampshire voters with simple tips on how they can avoid phishing attacks and mis/disinformation generated by artificial intelligence. The ultimate purpose of these educational videos is to empower voters and remind them that local and state election officials are the trusted source of election information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

History

On Sunday, January 21, 2024, New Hampshire Secretary of State David M. Scanlan heard reports of numerous residents in the Granite State who had received a call with what appeared to be President Joe Biden's voice telling these residents not to bother participating in the New Hampshire Presidential Primary slated for Tuesday, January 23rd. The voice in the call stated, "It's important that you save your vote for the November election. Your vote makes a difference in November, not this Tuesday."

The Secretary and the NH Attorney General's Office recognized the call to be an artificially generated attempt at voter suppression and responded quickly. Secretary Scanlan did several interviews with national, international, and local media denouncing the call as an act of voter suppression while reassuring voters that their votes in the Presidential Primary would count. The Attorney General and New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu amplified this message, emphasizing that affected residents, local election officials, and voters should continue to feel confident in the integrity, transparency, and fairness of elections in the state of New Hampshire (through state and federal enforcement actions, the perpetrator was fined over six million dollars).

The Biden robocall highlighted the challenges Secretaries of State face when deviant actors utilize artificial intelligence and other forms of social media to create false information in a way that disrupts traditional safeguards that have successfully secured the integrity of the election process in their states.

For over 100 years, New Hampshire has prided itself on the ease and transparency of its election process. The ease of registering to vote, coupled with the many checks and balances in place to ensure transparency when voters cast their ballots, has led to high voter confidence in the state. According to a November 2024 University of New Hampshire Survey Center poll taken after the 2024 General Election, 91% of New Hampshire residents were either "Very confident" (73%) or "Somewhat confident" (18%) that their vote in the November 2024 election was counted accurately. This is 25% higher than an August 2024 Pew Research Poll that tracked the national voter confidence average at 61% ([Majorities are confident 2024 election will be fair, but Republicans less sure | Pew Research Center](#)).

The survey also found that 96 percent of voters found it easy to vote in New Hampshire.

Despite the high voter confidence rate in NH, concerns about declining voter confidence had been voiced in the state in recent years. In response to this state and national trend, Secretary Scanlan formed, in April of 2022, the Special Committee on Voter Confidence, an eight-person bipartisan group charged with assessing and identifying areas of strength and areas of concern regarding voter confidence in the state. Over a span of four months, the Committee held nine public hearings, listened to 111 in-person testimonies, read 347 written testimonies, and participated in nine working sessions, all geared toward "the present New Hampshire [election] system, why citizens should have confidence in it, and how it might be improved to increase confidence."

In its final report, the Committee acknowledged that "confidence in elections is lower than in the past but still high". As a means to address – and reverse – the downward trend of voter confidence, the Committee recommended the Secretary of State pursue measures that increased emphasis on voter education, particularly in the area of helping voters identify mis/disinformation. Doing so, the Committee concluded, would help voters be more familiar with the election process in NH, which would in turn empower NH voters with factual knowledge to dispute mis/disinformation.

The deepfake robocall of January 21st, 2024, coupled with the findings of the Committee on Voter Confidence, led NH Secretary of State Scanlan to prioritize continued *reactive* collaboration with law enforcement and local election officials to respond quickly to AI-generated and false media when it appears, while also *proactively* educating voters with tips on how to avoid falling prey to social media misinformation, disinformation, and phishing attempts.

In July 2024, Secretary Scanlan drew on funding from a Homeland Election Security Grant and engaged with IDEEUH Media to create three 90-second videos highlighting the importance of cybersecurity as a civic responsibility. This collaborative project, with its own unique brand of AI-generated messaging, “brings to life” prominent Granite Staters Daniel Webster, John Stark, John P. Hale, and Franklin Pierce as talking statues who offer New Hampshire voters simple tips on ways to avoid mis/disinformation and phishing attacks generated by artificial intelligence on social media platforms.

The New Hampshire Secretary’s objectives involved countering false information with truth and instilling in the voter the steeled confidence that local and state election officials are the trusted source of election information.

Significance

To honor New Hampshire’s past and commitment to countering mis/disinformation in the present, and to honor and secure for future generations the assurance of election integrity, Secretary Scanlan chose to highlight famous NH historical figures Daniel Webster, John Stark, John Parker Hale, and Franklin Pierce through three 90-second videos. The videos offer Granite Staters simple, practical tips on how to recognize disinformation on social media and fact check sources. These statues not only welcome visitors to the NH state capitol, but also serve as a reminder of the ideals they stood for, and the ideals Granite Staters continue to uphold in this treasured democracy.

[Educational Videos | New Hampshire Secretary of State](#)

- 1. 90-second educational video on MISINFORMATION.** Often referred to as a “Giant” in New Hampshire’s history, **Daniel Webster** achieved lasting fame as a statesman, lawyer, and orator, a fierce proponent of “one country, nothing but our country”. He is often credited as “Guardian of the Nation, Defender of the Constitution, and Preserver of the Union” (*The People’s House* 55).
 - In a nod to his desire to preserve the Union and his desire to “Guard” the nation, Webster offers tips to our young voter on how to spot **Misinformation** as it appears on his cell phone. Webster suggests the voters VET (“Verify, Educate, and Think first”) before believing an unusual – and seemingly untrue – message. Secretary Scanlan closes the 90 seconds by advising the viewer that “If you can’t VET it, forget it.”
- 2. 90-second educational video on PHISHING.** American Revolutionary hero **John Stark** rose to prominence at both the Battle of Bunker Hill and the Battle of Bennington. His tactical military victory in the Battle of Bennington earned him the title “Hero of Bennington”. In the Granite State, General Stark is best known for his famous “Live Free or Die” remark, the official NH state motto by virtue of an act passed by the state legislature in 1945.
 - Granite Staters, like General Stark, embrace a fierce independence which New Hampshire history reflects. NH was the first state to declare independence from Great Britain, and NH ratified its Constitution four years before the adoption of the US Constitution. Yet, in a current age of increasing *interdependence* due to malicious cyber **phishing** attacks, Stark cautions our two tourists to “PICK (Pause, Identify Incorrect Grammar, Check it Out, Know) before you click” on unexpected and suspicious links. Clicking on links that are cyber-attacks in disguise causes institutional systems to be exposed and compromised. Secretary Scanlan closes the 90 seconds by stating, “In New Hampshire, we have choices,” then proceeds to assure the voter that “When you PICK before you click, you make the smart one.”
- 3. 90-second educational video on ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE.** **John Parker Hale & Franklin Pierce** lived lives of great political acumen, yet both differed in how they perceived their political roles. Known for his patriotic courage as an advocate for the “dearest rights of man”, **Hale** solidified his place in historical lore as the 1st abolitionist senator; Frederick Douglas spoke at the dedication of Hale’s statue in 1892.

Pierce, a Brigadier General in the Mexican American War, later served as the nation's 14th, and New Hampshire's only, president. Controversy followed Pierce long after his death, as his desire to preserve the Union at all costs led him to often "turn a blind eye to slavery" (*The People's House* 83).

- Like the fierce debates between Hale and Pierce over how best to preserve the Union, the debate on how to properly use **Artificial Intelligence** in the 21st century has gripped society and will likely continue to be debated for decades. In a definite "tongue in cheek" manner, Hale and Pierce, well over 150 years after their deaths, open the video debating each's merits. As their 21st century, very unreal "conversation" ends, Pierce congratulates the Granite State viewer for recognizing the fake AI-generated conversation by "saying", "Good thing the people in the 603 are smarter than the computers". When faced with social media that appears too real to be true, Secretary of State Scanlan closes the video by calling on the voter to "Do a little research first. Compare before you share. Don't be fooled by AI. After all, we made statues talk!"

Each educational video ends with a nod to NASS's #trustedinfo2024 campaign.

This community-focused effort aims to empower the voter to be part of a collective solution in generating awareness for what Secretary Scanlan and his office are actively doing to ensure the continued integrity of our elections. For over 100 years, NH has placed a premium on maintaining high standards of voter information protection and establishing best practices for secure elections where every voter feels their vote matters and their information is secure.

Impact/Results

One of the most rewarding parts of the job for the Secretary of State and local election officials is administering successful elections. Preserving election security and integrity measures is an ongoing effort and requires continued collaboration between the Secretary of State, the NH Attorney General, state and local election officials, and the voter. This collaboration is the cornerstone of trust in NH elections.

While our country and state's Founding Fathers did recognize the importance of an educated electorate, they never could have imagined a world of cybercrime and ransomware. Yet here we are.

Cybersecurity is a civic responsibility.

According to a 2024 Pew Research Center Survey, 73% of US adults have seen "inaccurate news about the 2024 presidential election at least somewhat often", and over half (52%) say it is "difficult to determine what's true and what's not" ([Americans' Views of 2024 Election News | Pew Research Center](#)).

In order to reach a wide swath of the general population, the cybersecurity videos targeted different sectors of the general population, and for different reasons:

- For a younger population more versed in social media platforms, the intent of the videos is to remind them of how quickly data can be compromised with quick, unthinking clicks that stem from complacent users. As young adults approach the age of 18, civic duties such as registering to vote and casting ballots become an opportunity to actively participate in the democratic process. Yet, the opportunity for bad actors to flood social media platforms with misinformation, disinformation, phishing attacks, and media generated by artificial intelligence increases significantly. Distinguishing the difference between what is real and what is AI-generated is difficult to discern;
- For seniors, who are traditionally more civically engaged with a long history of voting but also the most vulnerable to cybersecurity scams, the intent of the videos is to offer simple tips on what to do and what not to do when receiving media that is deceiving but difficult to see at first glance;

- For those in-between the youth and seniors, the sect of the NH population with a general command of cybersecurity and civic duty, the messaging of the videos builds on their base-knowledge of civics and cybersecurity; and
- For election officials, often the front-line defense against local cyber security attacks related to elections, as they have access and use systems with sensitive voter data and social media on a professional basis, the messaging emphasized how the action of one can affect many others, especially when it comes to cybersecurity.

As deviant actors continue to use social media platforms to misinform and mislead voters, NH Secretary Scanlan has called on voters to be vigilant in honoring their role as safeguards of NH elections. He stated, "This is a new area in elections so we're going to have to study it and figure it out. There needs to be a quick response to misinformation and disinformation that's out there. And the voters have to take some responsibility, too, in understanding the facts and not believing everything they see."

The significance of the videos has been and will continue to be to raise awareness to the public on how to be resilient forces in a community grappling with solutions to the work of deviant actors.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Videos

- [Cybersecurity and Civic Education: Misinformation](#)
- [Cybersecurity and Civic Education: Phishing](#)
- [Cybersecurity and Civic Education: AI-Generated Content](#)

Press Releases

- [12-22-22 Final Report of the Special Committee on Voter Confidence](#)
- [09-03-24 New Hampshire Secretary of State Release Series of Civic Education Videos on Cybersecurity](#)

Social Media





New Hampshire Secretary of State

October 1



October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month and American Archives Month! We happen to have a few videos that celebrate both months at once. Let's kick it off with the creator of our famous "Live Free or Die" state motto, General John Stark!



YOUTUBE.COM

Cybersecurity and Civic Education: Phishing

Civic responsibility is about more than just registering to vote and participating in New Hampshir...



New Hampshire Secretary of State

September 5



Artificial intelligence is a powerful tool that can make statues talk (seriously!). It can also be used to confuse and mislead voters. Check out this video from the Secretary of State to find out what you can do to make sure AI doesn't fool you [#TrustedInfo2024](#) [#Protect2024](#)



YOUTUBE.COM

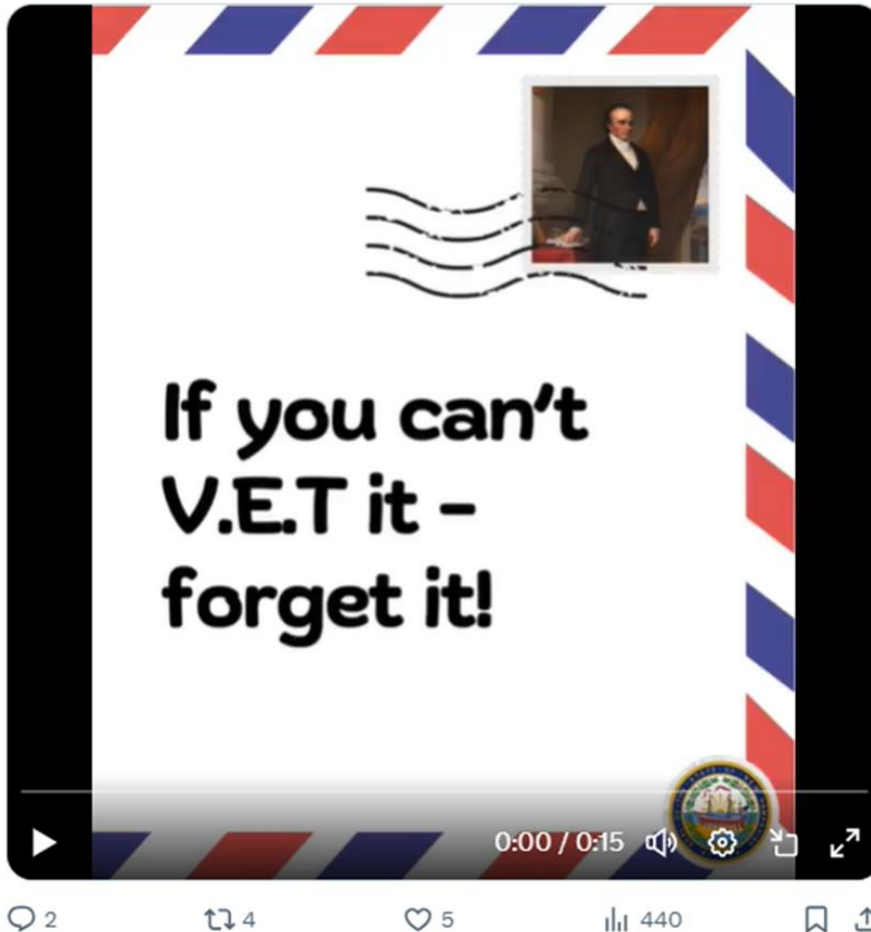
Cybersecurity and Civic Education: AI-Generated Content

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a powerful tool that can streamline many processes and even make st...



New Hampshire Secretary of State @NHSecretary · Oct 9

We have lots of info at our fingertips nowadays, which also exposes us to a lot of mis- and disinformation. Make sure you verify your sources and refer to official sources like the Secretary of State for election info. If you can't VET it, forget it! [#CybersecurityAwarenessMonth](#)



News Clips

CNN Politics (1/22/2024): Steck, Em and Andrew Kaczynski.

Link: [Fake Joe Biden robocall urges New Hampshire voters not to vote in Tuesday's Democratic primary | CNN Politics](#)

AP (1/22/2024): Swenson, Ali and Will Weissert.

Link: [Fake Biden robocall being investigated in New Hampshire | AP News](#)

NBC News (2/6/2024): Seitz-Wald, Alex.

Link: [N.H. attorney general says he found source of fake Biden robocalls](#)

NPR (5/23/2024): Bond, Shannon.

Link: [Criminal charges and FCC fines issued for deepfake Biden robocalls : NPR](#)

Ink Link (9/3/2024)

Link: [New civic education video series on cybersecurity released by NH Secretary of State » Nashua Ink Link](#)

WMUR News 9 (9/9/2024): Litterst, Isabel.

Link: [NH secretary of state releases videos to educate voters about cybersecurity](#)

Granite State News Collaborative (10/8/2024): Ford, Rosemary and Caitlin Agnew.

Link: [Fostering civic engagement: New Hampshire's initiative to strengthen voter education — Granite State News Collaborative](#)

Concord Monitor (10/28/2024): Watkins, Rhianwen.

Link: [Concord Monitor - Q&A: How to avoid misinformation around the elections](#)