

REPORT FROM NORTH CAROLINA MAKES REALITY WINNER LEAK FAR MORE IMPORTANT

According to NPR, the poll books in six precincts in Durham County, NC, went haywire on election day, which led the entire county to shift to paper poll books.

When people showed up in several North Carolina precincts to vote last November, weird things started to happen with the electronic systems used to check them in.

“Voters were going in and being told that they had already voted – and they hadn’t,” recalls Allison Riggs, an attorney with the Southern Coalition for Social Justice.

The electronic systems – known as pollbooks – also indicated that some voters had to show identification, even though they did not.

[snip]

At first, the county decided to switch to paper pollbooks in just those precincts to be safe. But Bowens says the State Board of Elections & Ethics Enforcement got involved “and determined that it would be better to have uniformity across all of our 57 precincts and we went paper pollbooks across the county.”

That move caused a whole new set of problems: Voting was delayed – up to an hour and a half – in a number of precincts as pollworkers waited for new supplies. With paper pollbooks, they had to cut voters’ names out and attach them to a form before people could get their

ballots.

The company that provided the software for the poll books is VR Systems – the company that the document Reality Winner leaked showed had been probed by Russian hackers.

But Susan Greenhalgh, who's part of an election security group called Verified Voting, worried that authorities underreacted. She was monitoring developments in Durham County when she saw a news report that the problem pollbooks were supplied by a Florida company named VR Systems.

"My stomach just dropped," says Greenhalgh.

She knew that in September, the FBI had warned Florida election officials that Russians had tried to hack one of their vendor's computers. VR Systems was rumored to be that company.

Because of the publicity surrounding the VR targeting – *thanks to the document leaked by Winner* – NC has now launched an investigation.

Lawson says the state first learned of the hack attempt when The Intercept, an online news site, published its story detailing Russian attempts to hack VR Systems. The leaked report said hackers then sent emails to local election offices that appeared to come from VR – but which actually contained malicious software.

[snip]

So now, months after the election, the state has launched an investigation into what happened in Durham County. It has secured the pollbooks that displayed the inaccurate information so forensic teams can examine them.

So this *may* be the first concrete proof that Russian hackers affected the election. But we'll only find out if that's true thanks to Winner's leak.

Except she can't raise that at trial.

Last week, Magistrate Judge Brian Epps imposed a protection order in her case that prohibits her or her team from raising any information from a document the government deems to be classified, even if that document has been in the public record. That includes the document she leaked.

The protective order is typical for leak cases. Except in this case, it covers information akin to information that appeared in other outlets without eliciting a criminal prosecution. And more importantly, Winner could now point to an important benefit of her leak, if only she could point to the tie between her leak and this investigation in North Carolina.

With the protection order, she can't.

Note one more implication of this story.

In addition to the Presidential election last year, North Carolina had a surprisingly close Senate election, in which Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Richard Burr beat Deborah Ross by 6%. Admittedly, the margin was large – over 200,000 votes. But Durham County is the most Democratic county in the state.

Burr, of course, is presiding over one of the four investigations into the Russian hacks. And while I don't think this story, yet, says that Burr won because of the hack, if the investigations shows VR was hacked in the state and it affected throughput in the most Democratic county, then it means Burr benefitted as clearly from the Russian hacks as Trump did.

The SSCI investigation has been going better than I had imagined. But this seems like a conflict of interest.

Update: I originally said the entire state switched to paper pollbooks. That's incorrect:

just Durham County did, which makes the issue even more important.