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Pennsylvania's top election official said Monday that he believes Russian hackers were targeting the state's voter registration data before last year's presidential election, an action which, if successful, could have enabled them to cause chaos at the polls.



Secretary of State Pedro Cortes said that based on limited information last week from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the hackers tried to "scan" the state's election computer system to see whether there was a way into it. He said voting machines were not a likely target because they are not connected to the internet and are not "penetrable."

The state was not told when precisely the attempts were made, or how many times the hackers probed the system for points of access, but federal officials told Cortes they had no evidence of a breach. In theory, altering registration information could sow confusion among voters and election officials, potentially depressing the number of ballots cast. "We were told, 'You're it;'" Russia tried to scan our system looking for vulnerabilities; there was no evidence of intrusion," Cortes said in an interview with the Inquirer and Daily News and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. He said the telephone briefing lasted from three to four minutes.

During last week's call, Pennsylvania was told it was one of 21 states targeted by Russians. The disclosure

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came as a special counsel is probing whether there was any coordination between Russia and associates of President Trump during the 2016 presidential election. It was not clear why federal authorities, who have known about the attempted hacks for months, waited so long to share the information with individual states.

Cortes said that the news came as a surprise to Pennsylvania, and that federal officials did not give any guidance on whether additional safety measures were needed. As it learns more, the state will decide on what steps to take to reinforce security in its election systems, he said. J.J. Abbott, spokesman for Gov. Wolf, said that to his knowledge no one from the federal government had previously contacted state officials about the problem, and no one working for the commonwealth had independently stumbled upon evidence of Russian hacking.

Though Cortes appeared confident there was no data breach, he acknowledged that he could not say with certainty that there was none. Hacking attempts are more common than people think, Cortes said. Indeed, state officials believe that in 2016 there were some 90 billion attempts to probe computer systems across all departments and agencies.

Finding evidence of an attack by another nation can be extremely difficult, in part because their hackers often are persistent and might break into a system months or years in advance of their actual goal, said Dan Wallach, a professor at Rice University in Texas who has examined voting systems. "It's exceptionally difficult to prove a negative," he said. "The apt hacker people who know what they're doing make it their business not to be seen."

Wallach also said that assuming voting equipment wasn't targeted solely because it's not connected to the internet could be a dangerous mistake. Experts say the code that controls voting machines could be poorly written or manipulated by wrongdoers with tech skills, for example. "It's just a bogus argument," Wallach said. "You might as well argue the Earth is flat." – *Philadelphia Inquirer*

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Tired of people watching its shows on Netflix and Amazon, FX Networks is persuading pay-TV operators to sell an alternative: FX+, a paid service offering hits "American Horror Story" and "Atlanta" without advertisements.

The network on Monday announced plans to make FX+ available for \$5.99 a month to the 4 million or so people who pay Cox Communications, which joins Comcast in selling the service. FX, owned by 21st Century Fox, is in the process of making deals with other pay-TV providers that will be announced in the coming months.

FX Networks Chief Executive Officer John Landgraf created FX+ so customers could watch all his shows on demand without decamping for Hulu, Amazon and Netflix, of which he's a frequent critic. Landgraf, who witnessed the **TV** business fret about the video cassette recorder and digital video recorder, has said Netflix is far more dangerous. Netflix has paid Fox for licenses to its shows, enticing millions of viewers away from Fox's own TV networks. The company, which will spend \$7 billion on programming next year, could turn into a monopoly whose concentration of power would damage the TV business. Fox has been the biggest supplier of hit shows to streaming services Netflix and Hulu, according to a recent report by analyst Michael Nathanson.

Older episodes of Landgraf's biggest hits, from "Atlanta" to "The Americans," have only been available to customers of those services. That has to stop, said Landgraf. "We shouldn't be licensing exclusively," Landgraf said in an interview. Just last year, Fox's TV studio sold exclusive rights to re-runs of FX's biggest new hit, "American Crime Story: The People v. O.J. Simpson," to Netflix. "I may not be in control of the decision to license every show FX makes because not all are produced and owned by FX Productions," Landgraf said. Netflix declined 4.4 percent to \$179.09 at 12:46 p.m. in New York. The shares had gained 51 percent this year through Friday.

Cable networks need to focus on what they are good at, in FX's case adult drama and comedy, because they can't spend the money to offer something for everyone like **streaming** services gain, Landgraf, 55, said. He has had to spend a considerable sum claiming rights to episodes of his shows, compensating TV studios, producers and other profit participants. FX+ now offers current and past seasons to 87 percent of the network's shows, some of which rank among the most-watched on cable. The network has also been a frequent nominee and winner at the Emmy Awards. The early results with Comcast have been encouraging. "They say they are very happy," said Landgraf, who declined to provide specific numbers. "We went from zero to a lot of subscribers in a short period of time." – *Bloomberg*

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Remember when TVs tuned analog cable channels without the need for a set-top box? Comcast's newly announced deal with LG Electronics and another with Samsung will soon allow those makers of high-end 4K smart TV sets to pull in pretty much everything digital, high resolution, and even ultra-high definition that Xfinity TV subscribers can currently nab on a Comcast X1 receiver.

Cleaning up the installation of wall-mounted and secondary location sets, a Comcast "gateway" (internet modem/router) will wirelessly zip shows to the TVs with an app, just the way it now serves shows to smartphones, tablets and laptops. The TV's own remote control will navigate users through an X1-like program guide to live and on-demand programming, including content stored in the customer's cloud DVR space.

Already available for tuning in "beta" (test) form on tiny Roku streaming TV boxes and plug-in sticks, the Xfinity TV Partners program and app leverages the ability to stream subscription content to TVs using Comcast's "secure private managed network," without counting against any internet service data caps and without the need for customers to use proprietary Comcast devices that come with \$9.95 monthly fees. In the beta phase, Comcast is giving customers a \$2.50 credit for using a Roku device instead of a primary conventional box, and will do likewise with the compatible smart TVs at launch, though the pricing could change.

Comcast first announced this alternative delivery system in 2016, when the Federal Communications Commission was pressing cable companies to open up the set-top box market. The company responded that box-free reception (which still allows Comcast to maintain control over the program guide and selection) would be an even better way to go. The technology does require the TV to have a fairly modern, robust and compatibly tuned microprocessor. That's why it will show up first (later this year) on 2016-and-later Samsung Smart TVs, then on current webOS-running LG Smart TVs (OLED and SuperHD) in early 2018. – *Philadelphia Inquirer*

