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ELECTION 2024 GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Alabama Secretary of State accuses League of Women Voters of 'data mining'

The League of Women Voters said they have used a website to steer people for voter registration resources for years.

BY: **ALANDER ROCHA** - JULY 30, 2024 7:01 AM



Alabama Secretary of State Wes Allen delivers his inaugural address during inauguration ceremonies at the Alabama State Capitol on Jan. 16, 2023 in Montgomery, Alabama. (Photo/Stew Milne)

Alabama Secretary of State Wes Allen Monday accused the League of Women Voters of capturing personal data on a voter registration website, an accusation the president of the group called a conspiracy theory.

Allen said in a Monday press release that a TV ad in Alabama produced by Vote411, an initiative of the League of Women Voters,

Singleton v. Allen
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captures voter's data and captures users data, including IP addresses and contact information. The ad guides Alabamians to register to vote via the Vote411 website.

In the press release, Allen described the initiative as a "sham," accusing Vote411 of data mining under the guise of voter registration assistance.

"This is simply a shady way to collect the IP addresses and personal data of Alabama citizens," the statement said. "In the website's fine print, the League of Women Voters disclose that 'The League may, from time to time, share the name and mailing address of its non-member financial supporters with other non-profit organizations.'"

Kathy Jones, president of the League of Women Voters of Alabama and its Education Fund, said in an interview on Monday that Vote411 guides users to appropriate state websites for voter registration and other election-related services. It's the way it has been done for years, she said.

"What Wes Allen said in his statement was very misleading. He's trying to build a conspiracy when there is no conspiracy," Jones said.



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She said the primary goal of Vote411 is to assist voters in accessing election information in all states, including candidate positions, ballot amendments, and polling locations.

An Internet Protocol (IP) address is a unique string of numbers assigned to a device connected to the internet. Websites routinely collect IP addresses to facilitate communication and provide services. While an IP address alone does not reveal sensitive personal information, it can be used as a starting point for malicious activities.

Tracing IP addresses is legal and commonly done by websites, apps, and internet service providers, as long as it's not for criminal activities, and individuals can also legally trace it unless they use hacking or deceptive methods, according to NordVPN, a global

cybersecurity company.

Drew Springall, an assistant professor in computer science and software engineering at Auburn University's Samuel Ginn College of Engineering, said in a statement that although this is "not some grand, insidious ploy," he doesn't see a "reason to not send people directly to the official Alabama voter registration web site."

"People might think they are registering to vote, but instead they're registering for an email contact list. Unfortunately, it's kind of normal for the Internet. Organizations want the ability to contact people for various reasons," he said.

Shannon Augustus, press secretary of the League of Women Voters of the United States, said in a statement that "VOTE411 is transparent about the data collected on our website, and voters should rest assured that using the tool does not result in the selling or sharing of their personal data."

The League of Women voters states that their "[browser automatically sends us an Internet Protocol \("IP"\) address](#) and certain other information (including the type of browser you use). We will use this IP address and other information to manage our website."

Laney Rawls, a spokesperson for the Secretary of State's office, did not respond to a question asking whether the Secretary of State's website also records IP address and other information. Instead, she said that the "Vote411 website coerces an individual into supplying personal identifying information such as their name, date of birth, home address, email address, and phone number under the guise of registering them to vote."

Jones said some information is stored if users want to receive information from Vote411 in the future, which they can opt out of.

"What Wes Allen is saying is — the way he said it — to me, was said in a way that I feel like it's trying to denigrate what we're doing and the League of Women Voters is making democracy work," she said.

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