

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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February 9, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Darin LaHood
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Barbara Comstock
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Research and Technology
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs Smith, LaHood and Comstock:

In the 2016 Presidential campaign, private e-mail server management proved to be an important issue—covered widely in the press, and mentioned extensively on the campaign trail. Last Congress, this Committee took a keen interest in private email server management and wider issues of cybersecurity in the Executive Branch. We are writing to inform the Committee of further opportunities to investigate Executive Branch cybersecurity issues that have been of intense interest to you in the past. We believe next week's Research and Technology Subcommittee hearing on cybersecurity presents an excellent opportunity to examine these issues and focus on these potential national security threats.

In the past two Congresses, under your leadership, the Science Committee opened an investigation into the alleged use of personal e-mail by the former Secretary of Energy and former Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In 2016, this Committee, in conjunction with the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,

opened a separate investigation of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's private e-mail server used during her time with the Department of State. Citing "numerous security concerns" and the possibility "that hostile actors gained access to Secretary Clinton's email account," this Committee subpoenaed the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and private companies for documents. Additionally, the Committee requested transcribed interviews with employees of one of the private companies¹.

Though Secretary Clinton left government service in 2013, the Science Committee stated that its oversight of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) still compelled an investigation of Secretary Clinton's email practices. The Committee sought to investigate the level of security that existed on her servers and possible records vulnerabilities that needed mitigation.² However, the Science Committee quickly dropped this investigation after the November 2016 Presidential election.

The current Administration, in its short time in office, has shown a shocking disregard for cybersecurity practices. Given your previous investigations of cybersecurity practices at multiple Federal agencies, including the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and Federal Reserve Board, and with respect to former Secretary Clinton's private email server, we trust you will be equally concerned with any and all careless cybersecurity practices of the Trump Administration. Although we are just weeks into the new Administration, already serious cybersecurity issues affecting the office of the President have arisen. Below are possible areas for review.

E-mail Server Management

According to various press reports, as of the end of last month, Senior Trump administrative staffers had active accounts on a Republican National Committee (RNC) email server.³ During the Bush 43 administration, officials used this same RNC email server to circumvent the Presidential Records Act of 1978—resulting in the erasure of more than 22 million relevant emails.⁴ Additionally, according to US Intelligence sources, Russian Intelligence Services hacked the Republican National Committee (RNC) email servers during the 2016 campaign—

¹ "Letters and Correspondence Regarding Clinton Server Subpoenas," maintained by Democratic staff of the House Committee on Science, Space & Technology, <http://democrats.science.house.gov/letter/letters-and-correspondence-regarding-clinton-server-subpoenas>

² *Id.*

³ Nina Burleigh, "Trump White House Senior Staff Have Private RNC Email Accounts," Newsweek, January 25, 2017, accessed at: <http://www.newsweek.com/trump-emails-rnc-reince-priebus-white-house-server-548191>; Nicole Rojas, "White House senior staffers linked to private RNC email accounts," International Business Times, January 26, 2017, accessed at: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/white-house-senior-staffers-linked-private-rnc-email-accounts-1603148>.

⁴ Many of the emails were later eventually recovered through the laborious efforts of the Obama administration. Dan Eggen, "Groups Announce Settlement in Missing Bush Emails Case," Washington Post, December 14, 2009, accessed at: <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2009/12/groups-announced-settlement-in.html>; Nina Burleigh, "The George W. Bush White House 'Lost' 22 Million Emails," Newsweek, September 12, 2016, accessed at: <http://www.newsweek.com/2016/09/23/george-w-bush-white-house-lost-22-million-emails-497373.html>; also see Nicole Rojas, "White House senior staffers linked to private RNC email accounts," International Business Times, January 26, 2017, accessed at: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/white-house-senior-staffers-linked-private-rnc-email-accounts-1603148>.

retrieving older RNC emails from an older RNC server.⁵ While there is no indication that any of the senior Trump staffers had their accounts hacked, their use of a private email server, so soon after the 2016 campaign and foreign intelligence service hacks, is quite dismaying.

Poor Security on Administration Twitter Accounts

An even bigger cybersecurity issue is the President's use of his Twitter account. A President's words have the power to move markets, imperil diplomatic relationships, or put militaries on high alert. President Trump has demonstrated this through his Twitter account, as his tweets have caused a drop in Toyota stock,⁶ caused the Mexican peso to tumble⁷, and caused the Mexican President to scuttle a planned diplomatic trip to the United States.⁸

Based on this power, the President's Twitter account should have strong cybersecurity safeguards. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. A well-known computer hacker, known by his Twitter handle @WauchulaGhost, revealed that the @POTUS twitter account was linked to an unsecured Gmail account.⁹ This reportedly opened an easy route to hacking the President's Twitter account—1) request a password reset from Twitter for the @POTUS account, 2) hack into the linked unsecured Gmail account, and 3) simply wait for the new password for @POTUS to arrive in the Gmail inbox.¹⁰ This vulnerability remained for days after @WauchulaGhost's tweet, not just on the @POTUS account, but the President's personal account @realDonaldTrump¹¹ and the @PressSec account of Press Secretary Sean Spicer,¹² which were both linked to unsecured Gmail accounts.¹³

⁵ Nicole Gaouette, "FBI's Comey: Republicans also hacked by Russia," CNN.com, January 10, 2017, accessed at: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/10/politics/comey-republicans-hacked-russia/index.html>; see "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections," Intelligence Community Assessment, January 6, 2017, accessed at: <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/01/06/report-on-russian-activities-and-intentions-in-recent-us-elections.html>.

⁶ Toyota stock fell about 2%—more than \$1 billion in market value—after then President-elect Trump threatened a "border tax" for Toyota because of the manufacturer's plan to build a factory in Mexico. Yuri Kageyama, "Toyota stock dips after Trump tweet on planned Mexico plant," Associated Press, January 5, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.yahoo.com/news/toyota-stock-dip-trump-tweet-005441021.html>.

⁷ Ben Eisen, "Dollar Jumps Against Mexican Peso After Trump Tweet," The Wall Street Journal, January 26, 2017, accessed at: <http://blogs.wsj.com/moneybeat/2017/01/26/dollar-jumps-against-mexican-peso-after-trump-tweet/>; Dolia Estevez, "Analysts Say Donald Trump's Tweets Are Weakening the Mexican Peso," Forbes Magazine January 6, 2017, accessed at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/doliaestevez/2017/01/06/analysts-say-donald-trumps-tweets-are-weakening-the-mexican-peso/#9d0f5e6198b1>.

⁸ Jacob Pramuk, "Mexican president says he canceled meeting with Trump, who maintains the decision was mutual," CNBC.com, January 26, 2017, accessed at: <http://www.cnbc.com/2017/01/26/mexican-president-pena-nieto-says-he-canceled-meeting-with-trump.html>; "Mexican President Pena Nieto cancels trip to Washington," Chicago Tribune, January 26, 2017, accessed at: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-trump-nieto-meeting-20170126-story.html>.

⁹ Laurie Segall, "Hacker to Trump: Fix your security settings on Twitter," CNN.com, January 24, 2017, accessed at: <http://money.cnn.com/2017/01/24/technology/trump-white-house-twitter-security/index.html>; Max Greenwood, "Trump's @POTUS Twitter account was tied to Gmail, The Hill, January 26, 2017, accessed at <http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/316318-potus-twitter-account-is-tied-to-personal-email>.

¹⁰ Sam Biddle, "Donald Trump is Using a Private Gmail Account to Secure the Most Powerful Twitter Account in the World," The Intercept, January 26, 2017, accessed at: <https://theintercept.com/2017/01/26/donald-trump-is-using-a-private-gmail-account-to-secure-the-most-powerful-twitter-account-in-the-world/>.

¹¹ Mr. Trump's Twitter account has been hacked before, as his @realDonaldTrump account was hacked in 2013. Kevin Cirilli, "Trump: Twitter account was hacked," Politico, February 21, 2013, accessed at: <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/02/donald-trump-twitter-account-was-hacked-087912>.

Cellphone Vulnerabilities

A still bigger cybersecurity vulnerability is President Trump's outdated Android phone. According to press reports, Trump has either a Samsung Galaxy S3 or S4¹⁴ and still uses it to access his @realDonaldTrump Twitter account.¹⁵ This is despite the fact that he received a "secure, encrypted [phone] approved by the Secret Service."¹⁶ Foreign intelligence services, or even an unsophisticated hacker, could easily exploit either of these phones. Foreign intelligence services could set up the President's phone to be a bug—recording everything around it and transmitting the recordings back to the hacker. Malware could also allow a foreign intelligence service to log keystrokes, take over the phone's camera, or track the phone's location.¹⁷

President Obama famously had a secure cellphone and complained about its lack of features.¹⁸ Nevertheless, he understood that the phone's limitations arose from the extreme cybersecurity safeguards needed to protect national security. Thus far, President Trump has not shown an appreciation of the security needs inherent with the office of the Presidency.

The specific issues discussed above—1) private email server use by senior staff of the Trump Administration, 2) lack of safeguards on the social media accounts of the President and his senior staff, and 3) the President's continued use of an unsecured, imminently hackable cellphone, all speak to this Administration's disregard for cybersecurity and the dictates of protecting national security. As this Committee has previously taken an interest in Executive Branch cybersecurity issues, we hope that the change of party in the Executive Branch will not diminish your interest in this important area.

The Majority's Oversight Plan for the 115th Congress says the Committee intends to "continue to hold cybersecurity oversight hearings" in order to review "compliance with federal information security standards and guidelines...." and that the Committee will continue to investigate issues within this Committee's jurisdiction, "regardless of where they may be found." Ensuring that cybersecurity standards and proper cybersecurity practices are applied across the government,

¹² Additionally, Sean Spicer has already twice tweeted characters that look like a password from the @PressSec Twitter account. Bryan Menegus, "Sean Spicer Just Tweeted Something That Looks an Awful Lot Like a Password," Gizmodo, January 26, 2017, accessed at: <http://gizmodo.com/sean-spicer-just-tweeted-something-that-looks-an-awful-1791649692>.

¹³ Sam Biddle, "Donald Trump is Using a Private Gmail Account to Secure the Most Powerful Twitter Account in the World," The Intercept, January 26, 2017, accessed at: <https://theintercept.com/2017/01/26/donald-trump-is-using-a-private-gmail-account-to-secure-the-most-powerful-twitter-account-in-the-world/>.

¹⁴ Alex Dobie, "Which Android phone does Donald Trump use?" Android Central, January 25, 2017, accessed at: <http://m.androidcentral.com/which-android-phone-does-donald-trump-use>.

¹⁵ Maggie Haberman, "A Homebody Finds the Ultimate Home Office," New York Times, January 25, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/25/us/politics/president-trump-white-house.html>.

¹⁶ "[A]ccording to people close to the transition, he has traded in his Android phone for a secure, encrypted device approved by the Secret Service with a new number that few people possess." Maggie Haberman and Glenn Thrush, "A Trump Administration, With Obama Staff Members Filling the Gaps," New York Times, January 19, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/us/trump-cabinet-picks-inauguration.html>.

¹⁷ Cecilia King, "That Old Phone Trump Uses for Twitter Could Be an Opening to Security Threats," New York Times, January 25, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/25/technology/donald-trump-phone-social-media-security.html>.

¹⁸ Aaron Pressman, "President Obama's New Smartphone is More Like a Toddler Phone," Fortune Magazine, June 10, 2016, accessed at: <http://fortune.com/2016/06/10/president-obamas-new-smartphone-is-more-like-a-toddler-phone/>.

particularly in today's cybersecurity environment, is critically important. We hope that your commitment to ensuring federal cybersecurity standards are in place and that common sense cybersecurity practices are upheld does not stop at the White House lawn.

We stand ready to join the Majority in any robust investigation of these issues and wider federal cybersecurity issues in general.

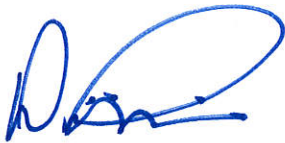
Sincerely,



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space,
and Technology



Don Beyer
Member
Committee on Science, Space,
and Technology



Dan Lipinski
Member
Committee on Science, Space and Technology