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Watson, Langevin Effort to Strengthen Federal Information Security Policy Passes House

Legislation included in National Defense Authorization Act

WASHINGTON - Congresswoman Diane E. Watson (D-CA), Chairwoman of the Government Management, Organization, and Procurement Subcommittee, and Congressman Jim Langevin (D-RI) announced that legislation they shepherded through the House of Representatives titled, "The Federal Information Security Management Act of 2010" was included as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2011. NDAA passed the full House last week.

The amendment combines Rep. Watson's H.R. 4900, the Federal Information Security Amendments Act and Langevin's H.R. 5247, the Executive Cyberspace Authorities Act. The measure codifies multiple policy recommendations made by the Obama Administration's 60-Day Cyberspace Policy Review, public-private sector working groups such as the CSIS Commission on Cybersecurity for the 44th Presidency, and GAO for remedying security deficiencies throughout the federal government. In addition, the legislation establishes a National Office for Cyberspace in the Executive Office of the President.

"Cyber threats against the Federal Government, as well as the U.S. Congress, have grown exponentially over the last year," stated Chairwoman Watson. "Congress and other government agencies are now under a cyber attack an average of 1.8 billion times a month. The magnitude of the problem indicates that we must take this issue much more seriously if we want to sufficiently protect against and avert the potential for a major cyber meltdown within the federal government that could have far-reaching national security and economic implications. I appreciate Representative Langevin's leadership on this important issue."

"The provisions in this amendment will establish strong, centralized oversight to protect our nation's critical information infrastructure and update our comprehensive policy for operating in cyberspace," said Rep. Langevin, who is co-chair of the House Cybersecurity Caucus. "I am grateful Representative Watson for working with me on this vital piece of legislation. This would not have passed without her support."

Specifically, H.R. 4900:

- Establishes a National Office for Cyberspace within the Executive Office of the President;
- Requires that the Director of the National Office for Cyberspace, to be appointed by the President, shall be subject to Senate confirmation;
- Revamps FISMA reporting requirements, requiring agencies to utilize new and automated monitoring and measuring capabilities to assess their vulnerabilities to cyber threats;
- Instructs OMB and agencies to incorporate information security into their procurement decisions.

“The fact that GAO’s latest report to Congress finds that 23 out of 24 agencies still have significant weaknesses in their agency wide information security programs is an indication to me that we need to devote more attention and resources to this issue,” added Chairwoman Watson. “I believe H.R. 4900 provides us a way forward to reducing our cyber risk across the agency community while instilling policy leadership on cybersecurity at the highest levels of our government.”

The legislation now awaits Senate action.

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