



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)
Mobilizing our Cyber Defenses: Maturing Public-Private Partnerships to Secure U.S. Critical Infrastructure

April 6, 2022

This Congress has been marked by a series of high-profile cyber incidents, from SolarWinds to Colonial Pipeline to JBS. We have been forced to evaluate our current approach to critical infrastructure security and how the Federal government and private sector collaborate. Our oversight revealed that we spend too much time examining challenges to effective public-private partnerships and are too slow to take bold action to address them – that is, unless Chairwoman Clarke is leading the charge.

I want to applaud Chairwoman Clarke for the recent passage of the Cyber Incident Reporting for Critical Infrastructure Act. This critical legislation will position CISA to help its private sector partners detect and disrupt malicious cyber campaigns sooner and provide enhanced situational awareness to inform strategic security investments. A mandatory cyber incident reporting framework is long overdue.

I want to thank the Chairwoman for working with private sector stakeholders, the Administration, and our colleagues in the Senate to get it right. I would also like to thank Ranking Member Katko and Subcommittee Ranking Member Garbarino for their efforts to get this important legislation across the finish line. Despite this progress, we must do more to maximize the cybersecurity benefits of public-private collaboration.

Yesterday, we heard from representatives from critical infrastructure sectors – including financial services and water — regarding how they are working with the Federal government to strengthen cyber defenses and build resilience. Although there were similarities in the witnesses’ testimonies — both stressed the value of continuous two-way engagement between the Federal government and the private sector – there were notable differences.

The financial services sector is well-resourced, regulated, and capable of actioning both classified and unclassified information. In contrast, the water sector is under-resourced, largely unregulated, and would benefit from concise, properly contextualized security guidance.

In short, while the financial services sector has the resources and capacity to engage in operational collaboration with the Federal government, the water sector is still working to establish a stronger security baseline. Similar disparities exist across the 16 critical infrastructure sectors, and the Federal government must tailor its approach to partnership accordingly.

In doing so, it must prioritize collaboration with the private sector with the understanding that not all critical infrastructure is equally critical. Efforts to identify the most “critical of the critical” infrastructure

are nothing new. But previous efforts – from the Section 9 designation to the National Asset Database — have fallen short.

As we work to identify the most significant critical infrastructure and define the associated benefits and burdens, we must leverage lessons learned. Before I close, I want to thank Congressman Jim Langevin and Ranking Member Katko for their commitment to modernizing how the Federal government engages with critical infrastructure. I look forward to working with them to refine and advance their approaches.

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