COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND
SECURITY
DEMOCRATS
Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, *Ranking member*

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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Challenges of Recruiting and Retaining a Cybersecurity Workforce

Subcommittee on Transportation & Protective Security

September 7, 2017

I want to take this opportunity to express my growing concern about the number of cybersecurity leadership vacancies across the Federal government.

There are numerous vacancies in cybersecurity positions across the Executive Branch, and last month, 8 of the 28 members of the National Infrastructure Advisory Council resigned in protest of the President's failure to prioritize cybersecurity.

Most dramatically, this Administration has chased out the State Department's first cybersecurity coordinator and plans to bury the State Department's cyber office in the Office of Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs.

And as we speak, there has been no nomination of someone to serve as the Under Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security's National Protection and Programs Directorate, which is tasked with leading the federal government's efforts to secure our Nation's critical infrastructure and protect federal civilian networks from malicious cyber activity.

A strong cybersecurity posture is essential to national security and to our ability to compete in the global economy. Policies necessary to build a strong cybersecurity posture require strong leadership.

I urge the President to quickly address cybersecurity leadership vacancies and organizational issues.

Turning to the issue at hand, I am eager to learn about innovative private sector approaches to developing and maintaining the cybersecurity workforce challenges.

I also hope to hear where the Federal government can better partner with the private sector to cultivate the cybersecurity talent.

When I am in Mississippi, all too often, I get asked why so much focus is placed on importing cybersecurity talent from overseas instead of cultivating the talent we have here at home.

I support tech-visas, but at the same time agree with my constituents that we must more aggressively build and recruit a domestic cybersecurity workforce.

We also must also do more to develop cybersecurity skills in overlooked talent pools. Today, African Americans and Hispanics – combined – make up only 12 percent of the cybersecurity workforce. We need to do a better job understanding why that is.

We can and should continue expanding traditional career pathways to diverse populations – from building relationships between public and private sector employers and diverse institutions of higher educations and implementing mentorship programs.

But we also have to start thinking “outside the box”.

We need to get young people from all backgrounds interested in cybersecurity early and we need to figure out how to transition displaced employees into the cybersecurity workforce.

According to Juniper Research, the cost of data breaches globally will increase to $2.1 trillion dollars by 2019.

And the State actors have demonstrated a clear interest in hacking into our critical infrastructure – from dams and the utility companies – to our elections.

We must build the cyber workforce necessary to protect our national security and our economy.

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