

Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: Prevention, Response, and Recovery: Improving Federal
Cybersecurity Post-SolarWinds
May 11, 2021

First, I want to thank each of our witnesses for joining today's important discussion, the second in a series of hearings Ranking Member Portman and I are conducting to help bolster our nation's cyber defenses and ensure the American people are safe from increasingly sophisticated online attacks.

Although it can often be difficult to understand the complexity and severity of some of these attacks from the outside, they have a significant cost on our national security. In many cases, these attacks can also affect our daily lives, as we saw with the recent ransomware attack on the Colonial Pipeline that was reported over the weekend.

Officials are continuing to investigate exactly what happened. But the extraordinary measures the company took to shut down the pipeline, and the possible ripple effects that will likely have on gas prices and our economy down the line, show that attackers will always look to exploit our vulnerabilities.

We must continue working to strengthen our cybersecurity defenses and response plans to prevent these kinds of attacks in the first place, and prevent them from having catastrophic consequences on our daily lives.

That is why I have continued to push for commonsense legislation to strengthen our response to these hostile assaults, whether they come from foreign adversaries or criminal actors who seek to harm our country.

I helped secure a \$650 million investment as part of the *American Rescue Plan* to help the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the federal government prevent adversaries and bad actors from hacking institutions and federal agencies essential to our pandemic response.

I have also introduced bipartisan legislation with Ranking Member Portman to provide the Department of Homeland Security with additional resources and encourage better coordination to address attacks that risk the safety and security of Americans.

While legislation and needed reforms will help bolster our national security against these increasingly sophisticated threats, we also need to rethink how we approach cyber warfare.

Our foreign adversaries, like the Chinese and Russian governments, do not rest. To successfully thwart their relentless assaults on American systems, we need to recognize they do not view the federal government as separate agencies, but as a single target.

That is what made the SolarWinds hack such a significant incident. A foreign adversary was able to infiltrate and spy on nine federal agencies and dozens of private companies at the same time, using the same vulnerability to access troves of sensitive data, including the emails of the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security at the time.

An attack like that requires a comprehensive approach, we cannot leave individual federal agencies to fend for themselves against attacks from nation states.

Agencies need to better anticipate their individual risk, and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and Office of Management and Budget need to take a government-wide approach to assessing cybersecurity threats, so we can better prioritize our resources to defend federal information systems.

Federal agencies must also ensure they are providing Congress with timely and relevant information in the event of major incidents so we can work with our executive branch colleagues to help provide the resources and authorities that are needed to address these threats.

That is why I am continuing my push to strengthen the *Federal Information Security Modernization Act*, so that Congress can ensure our cybersecurity apparatus is working hand-in-hand across the federal government to support a coordinated response to cyber intrusions, while providing transparency.

Today's hearing will focus on the safety and security of our federal agencies, and how our government's lead cybersecurity experts are working to protect the information systems of departments that are critical to safeguarding our national security and providing essential services to the American people.

Today's witnesses are uniquely qualified to help the Committee understand how agencies are assessing the damage of these recent breaches, what we need to do to combat these threats – how to improve transparency with Congress, and the challenges they have faced in recovering from these attacks.

Protecting the American people from these ever-evolving attacks, especially in the face of a pandemic that has moved our lives increasingly online, requires immediate action on a bipartisan basis. I know this Committee can work together to tackle this enormous challenge.

With that, I turn it over to Senator Portman and thank him for joining me to help address cyber-attacks and secure our nation.