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July 25, 2018

The Honorable Walter G. Copan  
Director  
National Institute of Standards and Technology  
100 Bureau Drive  
Gaithersburg, MD 20899

The Honorable General Paul M. Nakasone  
Director  
National Security Agency  
9800 Savage Rd., Suite 6272  
Ft. George G. Meade, MD 20755

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen  
Secretary  
Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Director Copan, General Nakasone, and Secretary Nielsen:

I write to request that your agencies collaborate to end government use of Adobe Flash in light of its inherent security vulnerabilities and impending “end-of-life” in 2020. While Flash will continue to exist past this point, it will no longer receive necessary technical support, significantly magnifying its existing cybersecurity deficiencies.

Flash is widely acknowledged by technical experts to be plagued by serious, largely unfixable cybersecurity issues that could allow attackers to completely take control of a visitor’s computer, reaching deep into their digital life. The United States Computer Emergency Readiness Team (US-CERT) has warned about the risks of using Flash since 2010. Adobe Systems, the company that maintains Flash, announced last year that the company will no longer provide technical support, including security updates, for Flash after 2020. At that point, Flash’s existing cybersecurity risks will only be compounded.

The federal government has too often failed to promptly transition away from software that has been decommissioned. In just one example, agencies were forced to pay millions of dollars for premium Microsoft support after they missed the deadline to transition away from Windows XP at its end-of-life in 2014, even though the technology’s last major update had been six years prior. The U.S. government should begin transitioning away from Flash immediately, before it is abandoned in 2020.

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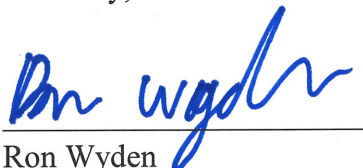
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As the three agencies that provide the majority of cybersecurity guidance to government agencies, the National Security Agency, National Institute of Science and Technology, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) must take every opportunity to ensure that federal workers are protected from cyber threats, and that the government is not unintentionally supporting risky online behavior. To date, your agencies have yet to issue public guidance for the unavoidable transition away from Flash. A critical deadline is looming—the government must act to prevent the security risk posed by Flash from reaching catastrophic levels. To that end, I request your three agencies collaborate to ensure that the following actions are taken:

1. Mandate that government agencies shall not deploy new, Flash-based content on any federal website, effective within 60 days.
2. Require federal agencies to remove all Flash-based content from their websites by August 1, 2019. To aid agencies with this effort, please:
  - a. Promptly expand the routine cyber-hygiene scans that DHS performs on each federal agency to include Flash content on the agency websites.
  - b. Provide each agency with a list of all Flash content on its websites along with guidance to promptly transition away from it.
3. Require agencies to create a pilot program to remove Flash from a small number of employee desktop computers by March 1, 2019 and then remove it agency-wide no later than August 1, 2019.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Chris Soghoian in my office.

Sincerely,



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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator