

April 20, 2017

Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman, Committee on Rules and Administration
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member, Committee on Rules and Administration
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Shelby and Klobuchar:

As you know, the cybersecurity and foreign intelligence threats directed at Congress are significant. However, the Senate is far behind when it comes to implementing basic cybersecurity practices like two-factor authentication. Two-factor means in addition to requiring a password to log in to a computer system (“something you know”), a user can be required to have a second form of authentication (“something you have”). Often, this second factor is a physical object, such as an ID card, a USB key, or a smartphone.

In the executive branch, employees are issued Personal Identity Verification (PIV) cards, which, in addition to serving as a form of photo identification, also contain a smart chip which they can use as a second-factor to log in to their computers. By mid-2016, eighty percent of all agencies were using PIV cards to log in to federal IT systems.

Today, the Senate neither requires nor offers two-factor authentication as an additional protection for desktop computers and email accounts. The Senate Sergeant at Arms does require two-factor authentication for staff who wish to log in to Senate IT systems from home, using a Virtual Private Network. This is a good first step, but the Senate must go further and embrace two-factor authentication for the workplace, and not just for staff connecting from home.

Moreover, in contrast to the executive branch’s widespread adoption of PIV cards with a smart chip, most Senate staff ID cards have a photo of a chip printed on them, rather than a real chip. Given the significant investment by the executive branch in smart chip based two-factor authentication, we should strongly consider issuing our staff real chip-based ID cards and then using those chips as a second factor.

It is critical that the legislative branch is able to secure our systems from hackers and foreign governments. This includes deploying two-factor authentication and other industry-standard

cybersecurity technologies. Accordingly, I urge you to direct the Senate Sergeant at Arms to require two-factor authentication for all Senate IT systems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Wyden". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ron Wyden
United States Senator