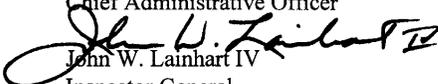


Office of Inspector General
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-9990

MEMORANDUM

TO: Scot M. Faulkner
Chief Administrative Officer

FROM: 
John W. Lainhart IV
Inspector General

DATE: July 18, 1995

SUBJECT: Chief Administrative Officer: Internet Security Weaknesses
(Report No. 95-CAO-03)

As part of our performance audit of House Information Systems (HIS) operations and Office-level computer security, we have reviewed a wide range of issues associated with computer security and control. In addition to the issues noted in Report No. 95-CAO-01 (Chief Administrative Officer: Member Computer Systems Security Weaknesses), Price Waterhouse LLP has also identified certain Internet¹ security and control weaknesses which are described in detail in the confidential attachment. We recognize and very much support the House's efforts to improve and expand communication with the public; however, such a move should be tempered with a complete understanding of the risks associated with "open" access.

The weaknesses identified in the attachment could expose information on House computer systems, including Member, Committee and House Officer systems, to unauthorized access, disclosure, modification, or destruction. For example, as part of our normal security testing, Price Waterhouse LLP identified vulnerabilities and exploited them to gain the highest possible level of access to systems through the Internet. By gaining this access, we could have changed documents, passwords, and other sensitive information residing on these systems. Thus, the primary emphasis of the confidential attachment focuses on issues pertaining to access to House computer systems through the Internet. Other related security areas are still under review by Price Waterhouse LLP and the results of these reviews will be reported separately.

¹ The Internet is a large international network that connects many U.S. government agencies, corporations, and academic institutions. It has expanded to provide as many as 20 million users with network services including e-mail, remote terminal sessions, and multi-media services such as the world-wide web.

We discussed our observations and recommendations for initial corrective action with your Associate Administrator for Information Resources and Deputy Associate Administrator for Technology Resources & Electronic Dissemination. Recommendations addressed the issues of:

- Security over access to House systems;
- "Firewall"² security implementation strategies; and
- Data security policies and procedures over House systems.

We notified all offices in which Internet security vulnerabilities were identified during testing. Furthermore, the initial corrective action steps identified by Price Waterhouse LLP are being implemented by your staff in order to protect House systems. Specifically, your staff immediately committed the needed HIS resources to ensure that required corrective actions are expeditiously taken.

This report has been prepared in order to immediately correct the identified weaknesses and is not intended to represent our final report on computer security issues.

If you should have any questions regarding the issues identified in this report, you can contact me on x61250.

Attachment

cc: Speaker of the House
Majority Leader of the House
Minority Leader of the House
Chairman, Committee on House Oversight
Ranking Minority Member, Committee on House Oversight
Members, Committee on House Oversight

² A firewall is a combination of computer hardware and software designed to control the flow of information between an organization's internal systems and systems outside the organization.