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Sen. Peters Blasts Trump's Cyber Response

Sen. Gary Peters (D., Mich.), ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, says he's "angered" by how President Trump has addressed the efforts of nation-state hackers to steal COVID-19 vaccine data from research labs in the U.S. and elsewhere.

"On July 16, 2020, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the U.S. released an advisory stating that the Russian government has been targeting our health care system ... in search of COVID-19 vaccine development and testing data," Sen. Peters said in a letter sent to the president yesterday.

"On Nov. 13, Microsoft published an alert warning of hacking groups connected to the Russian and North Korean governments that targeted COVID-19 vaccine and treatment researchers in Canada, France, India, South Korea, and the United States. According to the alert, some of their attacks were successful," he noted.

"I am angered by these government-sponsored cyber attacks and your lack of action to deter them over the past months. And now you've decided to fire the director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the deputy director of CISA, and the CISA assistant director for cybersecurity," he told the president.

"CISA, with the Department of Defense, is responsible for the cybersecurity of your own Operation Warp Speed to develop a COVID-19 vaccine, and you've removed its top three cybersecurity leaders. While I have full confidence in the dedicated workforce at CISA to continue to execute their mission despite your actions, the removal of these individuals invites attacks from our adversaries based on a perception of instability, rather than prevent them," he said.

"I urge you, again, to send a strong message to any foreign government attempting to hack into our medical institutions that this behavior is unacceptable," Sen. Peters said. "The administration should use the tools at its disposal, including the threat of sanctions, to deter future attacks against research institutions."

"In the event that any foreign government directly threatens the lives of Americans through attacks on medical facilities, other Department of Defense capabilities should be considered to make it clear that there will be consequences for these actions," he said. – Tom Leithauser, tom.leithauser@wolterskluwer.com