

Testimony of Rep. Anna G. Eshoo

Members Day Hearing on Modernization Efforts
Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
April 15, 2021

Chairman Kilmer and Vice-Chair Timmons, I appreciate being given the opportunity to share my thoughts on modernization efforts in Congress. I fully support the Committee's efforts to modernize congressional procedures, especially as it relates to the adoption of technology and implementation of measures to improve our cybersecurity. I urge the Committee to continue its commendable work on both of these fronts.

Part of the purpose of the Select Committee is to "help Congress fulfill its Constitutional role as a co-equal branch of government." When it comes to cybersecurity, however, we are not on par with the Executive branch. In particular, we must move expeditiously to require multi-factor authentication (MFA) for access to all House devices. I've long advocated for such a requirement before this committee, at the House Rules Committee, and in correspondence with the CAO. I recognize that MFA is less convenient to use, but the security benefit far outweighs the cost.

MFA for our desktop computers is optionally available to offices today and my office has begun the process of instituting this as a requirement. We also have MFA requirements for remote access to the House network in certain instances (though not in all instances). This piecemeal approach is insufficient. As the Committee knows so well, cybersecurity best practices are like public health measures in that they work best when everyone implements the recommendations. Being on a shared network with vulnerable nodes makes all of us vulnerable. This is why requirements are necessary.

We should do everything possible to protect our emails, files, and other information from nefarious actors because Congress is vulnerable to foreign governments and other adversaries. In 2017, British security services uncovered a cyber-attack against Parliamentary email servers, reportedly conducted by the Russian government. More recently in 2019, Russian hackers reportedly obtained access to classified U.S.-UK trade documents through the email account of Former Trade Minister Liam Fox. We mostly find out about such virtual invasions years or decades after the fact, meaning we may not even know if intruders are surveilling us today. The USSR successfully surveilled certain congressional rooms in the 1960s and 1970s, which we did not become aware of until decades later.

These pressing issues can be mitigated through basic efforts like requiring MFA, and I thank the Committee for considering my recommendations.