



Statement Of

Larry Madison, Master Sergeant, USAF, (Ret)

Deputy Legislative Director

The Retired Enlisted Association

Before The

House Committee On Veterans' Affairs

July 18, 2006

DISCLOSURE OF FEDERAL GRANTS OR CONTRACTS

The Retired Enlisted Association does not currently receive, has not received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous years any federal money for grants or contracts. All the Association's activities and services are accomplished completely free of any federal funding.

MR. CHAIRMAN, RANKING MEMBER FILNER, and MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony for the record to the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. This testimony is provided by Larry Madison on behalf of the members of The Retired Enlisted Association.

The Retired Enlisted Association is a Veterans' Service Organization founded 42 years ago to represent the needs and points of view of enlisted men and women who have dedicated their careers to serving in all the branches of the United States Armed Services Active Duty, National Guard and Reserves, as well as the members who are doing so today.

All of us were shocked and alarmed in early May when it was announced that a laptop computer containing the personal data of nearly 29 million Veterans, Active Duty, and Guard and Reserve personnel was stolen. And although we are pleased that the laptop has been recovered and it appears that the data was not accessed, the problems regarding data security at the Department of Veterans Affairs still needs to be corrected.

That's why we are so pleased with the draft legislation to better protect the sensitive personal information of Veterans, Active Duty, and Guard and Reserve personnel that is the focus of the hearing today.

I want to thank Chairman Buyer and all of the Members of the Committee for the collective, non-partisan way in which you have sought to handle this crisis. It was sincerely gratifying to watch the Committee work together in seeking to learn the details of the situation and then coming up with the legislation we are discussing today which will, hopefully, result in greatly increased security for the personal data of millions of veterans that is kept by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Like many others, we were amazed to learn during the hearings held by this Committee about the warnings from the GAO and the VA's own inspector general and assistant inspector general going back as far as 1997 concerning the weaknesses in the VA's information security systems.

And although we hope this has given the leadership in the department a wake-up call that will result in a serious effort to fix their data security system, we believe the legislation under discussion today is necessary to insure the corrections needed at the VA are accomplished and to help restore the faith of America's veterans in the security of their personal information that is kept by the department.

Under Secretary for Information Services

In particular, we believe the creation of the position of Under Secretary for Information Services

is vital if the task of increasing personal data security in the Department is to succeed. During the testimony given by officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs before this committee it was painfully apparent that there was not a single individual who was in charge and responsible for data security. The change envisioned in this legislation is a positive one that we believe is urgently needed.

Congressional Reporting

In addition, we applaud and strongly support the reporting requirements outlined in the legislation. We believe the annual compliance report to Congress and the monthly reports to the Secretary are urgently needed and they send a signal to the Department about the seriousness with which this Committee and the Congress take this issue.

Provision of Credit Protection Services

We note that the legislation provides for credit protection services for any individual whose personal data held by the VA was breached, at no expense to the individual, if the individual requests one of the credit protection services contained in the bill. We believe this is reasonable way to handle this issue and we support this provision.

Contract with Credit Reporting Agency

We are pleased that the legislation directs the Secretary to enter into an agreement with one or more credit reporting agencies and that this agreement will be in place so that any breaches in the future that place the personal data of Veterans in jeopardy can be quickly and efficiently monitored by that agency if individual veterans request such service.

Use of Social Security Numbers for Identification

The last item we want to mention is the use of Social Security numbers for identification.

As you know, the draft legislation prohibits the use of Social Security numbers on any individual to identify that individual, unless the use of the Social Security number is required by law or the Secretary determines that such use is necessary for the identification of an individual.

It is our hope that this is the beginning of process within the federal government of getting away from using an individual's Social Security number as a person's one and only ID. Although we recognize the efficiency of using one number – the Social Security number – as the all-purpose identifier, it is obvious that doing so also increases the efficiency with which a stolen Social Security number can be used to commit identity fraud or other criminal behavior.

Frankly, we are alarmed at the pervasive use of the Social Security number for identification purposes and we believe all Americans would be better off if the use of the Social Security number were severely circumscribed.

We hope this section of the draft legislation will be as carefully monitored as the other aspects of the bill because we can foresee a less than enthusiastic response for this provision from the IT persons within the Department.

While the use of separate ID numbers may be less efficient, we believe veterans will be better served in the long-run because their Social Security numbers will less widely circulated than is the case presently.

Once again, TREA wants to thank the Members of the Committee for the way you have joined together to investigate this most serious situation and for the draft legislation you are proposing. Based on what we have learned, we believe this draft legislation will result in the personal data security that is needed for our veterans.

This concludes my statement and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Biography of Larry D. Madison, Master Sergeant, USAF (Ret)

Deputy Legislative Director, Washington Office, The Retired Enlisted Association

Master Sergeant Larry D. Madison was drafted in 1972 upon graduation from college. He enlisted in the Minnesota Army National Guard on 16 October 1972 and completed basic and MOS training at Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo. On 10 June 1974 he transferred to the 451st Army Reserve Band at Ft. Snelling, Minn.

Upon his acceptance into graduate school in 1976 he moved to Waco, Texas, where he transferred to the 344th MI Detachment (Armed Forces Censorship), U.S. Army Reserve. After completing his graduate studies in 1977 he moved back to Minnesota and transferred to the 469th Military Intelligence Detachment (STRAT) at Ft. Snelling. In 1979 he transferred to the 407th Civil Affairs Company at Ft. Snelling and served as a Religious Relations/Cultural Affairs specialist.

In 1980 he transferred to the 934th Tactical Airlift Group, Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, United States Air Force Reserve and became the NCOIC of the Chaplains' Office. He served in that capacity until 1987 when he moved to Manassas, Virginia, and transferred to the 135th Tactical Airlift Group, Maryland Air National Guard, where he again served as NCOIC of the Chaplains' Office. He retired from that position and from the military on 3 March 2003.

Master Sergeant Madison holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Studies from Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minn. In addition, he completed all course work in Church-State Studies graduate program at Baylor University, Waco, Texas. His personal awards include the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Force Commendation medal, the Air Force Achievement Medal and the Master Chaplains' Assistant Badge. Master Sergeant Madison is married to Anne Woodrow Madison and they live in Manassas, Virginia. They have two adult children: James, a civil engineer and David, a college student and a member of the Coast Guard Reserve.