Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

January 19, 2007

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Comptroller General Walker:

On June 9, 2006, the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing to review cyber security challenges at the Department of Energy (DOE). The Subcommittee heard testimony from several witnesses that DOE has had considerable difficulty maintaining a secure cyber security program for its unclassified and classified networks. If left unattended, cyber security weaknesses at DOE could allow individuals or groups backed by nation-states the opportunity to penetrate DOE's networks and gain access to sensitive and classified information. We know the hackers are out there, and they continue to target DOE assets and stage their attacks on a daily basis.

In response to a cyber attack in 2005 that successfully penetrated and removed detailed personnel information on more than 1,500 employees of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), DOE's Chief Information Officer presented a February 2006 report entitled, "Revitalization of the Department of Energy Cyber Security Program" (Revitalization Plan). The purpose of the Revitalization Plan was to upgrade systematically the DOE cyber security posture over 12 months and "establish a vital, institutionalized cyber security program."

Nearly 12 months later, it is unclear whether DOE's revitalization program is working. A major cyber security event last year at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) resulted in the removal of hundreds of classified documents. A November 2006 report from DOE's Inspector General (IG) on this incident noted that cyber security policies "designed to protect classified information were nonexistent, not enforced or were inadequate."

Another January 2007 report from the DOE IG identified significant ongoing problems with the Department's certification and accreditation system for ensuring the security of information systems. The report points out that "despite recent efforts by the Department to improve its process by strengthening guidance, many of its systems were not properly certified and accredited for operation."

In response to these findings, we ask that you review DOE's cyber security programs, and provide a report to us on the security of unclassified and classified information networks. Please include an assessment of the implementation of the commitments made in the CIO's February 2006 Revitalization Plan, and determine whether specific NNSA and DOE sites and laboratories -- including LANL -- are implementing effective cyber security programs.

If you have any questions regarding this request, please have your staff contact either Christopher Knauer with the Majority staff (202/225-2927) or Dwight Cates with the Minority staff (202/225-3641) of the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

Sincerely,

John D. Dingell
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Joe Barton
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Bart Stupak
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Ed Whitfield
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

J. Dennis Hastert
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality