

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Keeping Veterans' Information Safe in Cyberspace Is Goal of House Bill

BY PATRICK YOEST, CQ STAFF WRITER

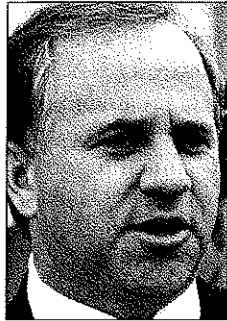
The House Veterans' Affairs Committee likely will approve on Thursday comprehensive cybersecurity legislation, which would overhaul information technology at one of the largest federal agencies.

The committee will mark up the bill (HR 5835) in the wake of a May theft of a Veterans Affairs Department laptop computer — later recovered — containing the personal information of 26.5 million veterans and their family members.

The bill is sponsored by the panel's chairman, Steve Buyer, R-Ind.

But the measure, which enjoys bipartisan support, also results from an information technology operation that has seen years of criticism from the VA's inspector general and the Government Accountability Office.

The bill aims to create more accountabili-



Steve Buyer

ty at the VA for cybersecurity.

It would create an Office of the Under Secretary for Information Security, elevating the position of the Chief Information Officer, with three deputy secretaries reporting to the new officer.

An inspector general's report issued July 11 found that "information security officers acted with indifference and little sense of urgency" to the theft, with the department's deputy secretary learning about the data theft more than a week after the information technology staff found out about it.

The bill also would require the VA to report to Congress after any data theft and provide credit monitoring and fraud remediation for affected individuals.

"We will go quickly to the veterans with full disclosure and with solutions in the event of a breach," Buyer said. "The burden will be on the government to offer veterans effective and prompt remedies."

Additionally, the bill would require a feasibility study on using personal identification numbers rather than Social Security numbers for veterans' benefits.

The House will also consider a measure (HR 5815) that would authorize the construction, rebuilding or planning of several VA medical facilities. ♦

The markup is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Thursday in 334 Cannon.