

Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Questions for the Record from Senator Grassley
To: Dr. Herbert Lin
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1. **Massachusetts Institute of Technology Report: “Keys Under Doormats: Mandating Insecurity by Requiring Government Access to all Data and Communications”**

As you know, days before our Committee hearing, the above report was issued by a number of security technologists. The report was highly skeptical of the government’s ability to mandate special access to encrypted communications without doing great harm to internet security. If you have had a chance to review it thoroughly, please comment on what effect, if any, it has on the views expressed in your written and oral testimony before the Committee.

Answer:

I have indeed read the report in detail, and I think the report has great value to the debate. In my testimony, I called attention to two aspects of the report that are worth repeating for the record here.

First was the report’s call for more specifics. Quoting from the report – law enforcement needs to “develop genuine, detailed specifications for what they expect exceptional access mechanisms to do.” That is absolutely correct – only with real specifics is a serious technical debate possible, and only with such a debate is it possible to assess the nature and extent of the actual security impact of any such mechanism. The report does describe some general risks of exceptional access, and these must be taken seriously, but they do not speak directly to any specific mechanism because no specific mechanism has been introduced publicly for consideration.

The second important aspect of the report was its list of key questions that would have to be addressed satisfactorily before government goes down the path of mandated exceptional access. In the strongest of terms, I endorse these questions as being critical—and I believe the Congress should require **written** answers to these questions from whatever Administration, if any, that decides in favor of mandated exceptional access.