

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 21, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to you to express our concern about the security of global undersea communications and energy cables, especially those that impact America's economic and national security and that of our allies and partners. As you are well aware, more than 95% of international internet traffic travels via undersea cables, including trillions of dollars in financial transactions each day. Moreover, the exact locations of most of these cables are openly published in order to reduce the likelihood of accidental damage from ships' anchors or fishing activities. Internet and telecommunications providers, including American firms, intend to invest billions of dollars in expanding the global network of undersea communications cables. Additionally, energy transmission cables are proliferating as governments look to new sources of electricity generation.

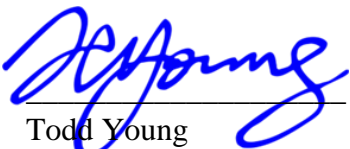
America's adversaries have been developing their capabilities to attack or disrupt critical undersea infrastructure. There is a long tradition, dating back well over a century, of belligerents attacking their opponents' underwater communications lines in the first phase of a conflict. For example, in both World Wars, Britain's first naval actions were to cut the telegraph cables connecting Germany to the Americas, and in 1918 a German U-boat severed lines connecting New York to both Nova Scotia and Panama. In addition to this kind of overt, kinetic attack, the nature of undersea infrastructure increases the feasibility of gray zone actions with plausible deniability. It is difficult to distinguish between an accident and a deliberate action on the seabed, and more difficult still to confirm who conducted such an action. On top of this, because this infrastructure is privately owned by commercial enterprises, repairs are the responsibility of these private companies, which are likely not prepared to maintain them under wartime conditions and are likely to seek the most cost-effective repair and maintenance options—even if that option is owned or operated by a foreign adversary or strategic competitor.

Given these threats and challenges, it is imperative that the United States undertake a review of existing vulnerabilities to global undersea cable infrastructure, including the threat of sabotage by Russia as well as the growing role of the People's Republic of China in cable laying and repair. If we are truly to deepen vital commercial and security relationships with willing partners and allies, this must be a national priority. We respectfully request that you provide responses to the following questions and direct senior administration officials to brief Members of Congress, including members of relevant committees of jurisdiction, on your plans and the resources and authorities needed to carry them out.


- 1) What is your Administration's overall strategy to guarantee the security of America's undersea infrastructure and to promote the security of that of our allies and partners?
- 2) The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 established the Cable Security Fleet (CSF). If authorized and sufficiently funded, what would be your assessment of the ideal size of the U.S.-flagged and -operated cable laying and repair vessel fleet to ensure sufficient cable repair capacity during a conflict or national emergency? How can the United States work with trusted allies and partners for additional capacity to support the expansion and repair of trusted undersea cable networks?
- 3) What is the Administration's strategy to encourage other nations to choose trusted suppliers in their selection of undersea cable manufacturers, particularly in any nation of concern or which may be vulnerable to coercion or covert action by America's adversaries?
- 4) How is the Administration working with the private sector to ensure that commercial enterprises' investments in undersea cables align with U.S. national security priorities?
- 5) How do you intend to protect the physical security of undersea cables in the open ocean, including through any interpretation of customary international law?
- 6) How is the Administration working multilaterally to collectively enhance security and monitor potential threats to undersea infrastructure, including through NATO, the Quad, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. As Congress works to continue its oversight of national security, it is vital that we understand the current state of the information backbone of our economy and efforts to protect it.

Sincerely,



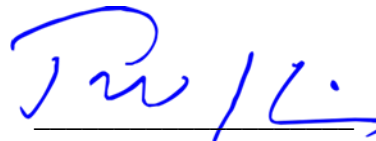
Todd Young
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



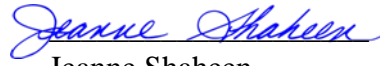
Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



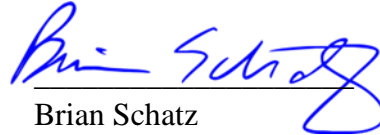
Pete Ricketts
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator