Biden administration wants 600,000 cybersecurity positions filled

An onslaught of ransomware attacks has compelled the US government to push for a cybersecurity hiring spree

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The cybersecurity field isn't immune to the nationwide staffing shortage, but President Joe Biden wants to change that.

Filling 600,000 vacant cybersecurity positions is now the top priority in the Biden administration's efforts to intensify the protection of digital infrastructure in the public and private sectors.

Snags in talent acquisition have left federal and local government, as well as big business, vulnerable to ransomware attacks and hacking. Recently, Biden assembled a team to work with the federal government in dealing with increasing cyber attacks.

To combat the tight labor market, GuidePoint Security, like many other private companies, is training veterans who were recently discharged from the military for jobs in cybersecurity.

"It takes way too long to bring people into the federal government," Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency director Jen Easterly said in a dialogue with the House Committee on Homeland Security earlier this month. Easterly said it's important to consider candidates who may not have a traditional educational background or years of formal experience in the industry, but possess the necessary technical skills and attitude.

Despite the pressing demand for talent, women occupy only 20% of all cybersecurity positions, according to the 2018 ISC Cybersecurity Workforce Study. Furthermore, those under 30 years old comprise just 3% of the federal government's IT labor pool, according to the Office of Personnel Management.

To expand the scope across various socioeconomic and academic backgrounds, government, private and non-profit organizations are teaming up with community colleges and historically black colleges and universities. Public Infrastructure Security Cyber Education Systems, a non-profit, allows university students a hands-on experience of tracking data on local government networks. Private companies, such as Microsoft, are offering free cybersecurity courses to every public community college to increase opportunities of discovering raw talent and training and honing their technical skills.

The Department of Homeland Security currently has 1,500 cybersecurity-related openings, which have impacted the agency's ability to protect the country. The recent introduction of a federal recruiting tool follows the DHS's continuous bid directed to finding young, diverse and natural talent. Key agencies across the federal government

fall below basic cybersecurity standards, with eight rating a C- in the Senate audit report, adding to growing concerns on cybersecurity.

Local and federal government bodies have long struggled to win against private sector companies in bidding wars for prodigies. The challenge stems from the need for local agencies to hire amidst the lack of competitive salaries.

"People know that if they work for a local agency, they're going to have to do everything," said Gartner Research director Sam Olyaei. "'I'm going to be the analyst. I'm going to be the engineer. I'm going to be the leader.'" The prospect is "not always attractive" to potential hires, Olyaei said.

According to Simone Petrella, chief executive at CyberVista, the bottom line is that the worker shortage stems from college graduates claiming no one will interview them because of their lack of experience. At the same time, employers claim they can't find any talent.

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