Cybersecurity measures on Capitol Hill have gained support after The Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday that intelligence officials have found that cyberspies from Russia and China have penetrated the networks controlling U.S. electric and other infrastructure.

Sen. Charles Schumer said he was alarmed by the report and was throwing his support behind a measure to create a White House cybersecurity adviser and augment the federal role in bolstering the country's cyberdefenses.

"Today it is China and Russia, but the same tools are potentially available to Iran and al Qaeda and others who may actively seek to do us harm," the New York Democrat said, adding, "The ripple effects from even a brief shut down of the power grid or other cyber networks could cripple the nation and have disastrous economic ramifications. This legislation would finally kick the federal government into gear to secure these vital networks."

Sens. John D. Rockefeller (D., W.Va.) and Olympia Snowe (R., Maine) are leading the effort to establish the adviser job as well as another measure that would establish federal security standards for computer networks running key infrastructure like electricity, banking and transportation.

Their legislation would also give the president emergency authority to require companies to take specific actions to secure their networks in the event of a crisis, much the way the federal government grounded airplanes after the 9/11 terrorist strikes.

These measures have run into headwinds from technology and privacy advocacy groups that warn the legislation would give the federal government too much say in software development.

"The bill appears to federalize the software industry," said Leslie Harris, president of the Center for Democracy and Technology. "It would be devastating to innovations and civil liberties." Under this legislation, new security technologies to protect U.S. infrastructure couldn't be employed until they received government approval, Harris said.

Backers of the legislation say it's just a starting point, and it will be adjusted as Congress takes up the measure. "We're trying to have all the stakeholders at the table and basically address everyone's concerns," said Jena Longo, spokeswoman for the Senate Commerce Committee. Rockefeller and Snowe are both members of the Commerce and Intelligence committees.

A White House cybersecurity review, taking stock of U.S. cybersecurity issues and drawing up plans to address them, is expected to wrap up next week. That, too, could add to the debate.