

White House Edits Exposed by Tracked Changes

US Senate Democrats are asking for an investigation after the Tracked Changes feature in Microsoft Word revealed White House edits in documents submitted for a Committee hearing. Independent businessman, Derrick Max, was asked to deliver to the Senate Committee his views on advocating an overhaul of Social Security. Max had asked a colleague to review the document. When Max emailed the document to the Committee, the colleague's comments were still visible. The colleague was revealed to be an associate commissioner of Social Security on loan to the White House – not exactly an unbiased third party.

According to Max, "The real scandal here is that after 15 years of using Microsoft Word, I don't know how to turn off 'track changes.'" When reporting on this incident, Woody's Office Watch, a free Internet publication that follows Microsoft Office, said, "If you want to 'clean' a document before sending it out, then grab the Remove Hidden Data tool from Microsoft". Both of these statements indicate a lack of understanding about MSWord's Tracked Changes feature.

According to the article, Max turned on the Tracked Changes feature, but that may be conjecture from the author since that information is not attributed to Max himself. It is entirely possible that Microsoft enabled the Track Changes feature without Max's knowledge when the document was emailed to his associate.

Beginning with Office XP, the Tracked Changes feature was greatly enhanced, and it is enabled by default when emailing a document through Outlook. This occurs automatically and the user is never warned that Tracked Changes are now enabled. Once enabled, Tracked Changes can be very difficult to remove. In many cases, the user can not turn it off. The Microsoft Remove Hidden Data tool does stop the document from collecting new Tracked Changes, but, in many cases, it fails to remove the information already collected.

The SRS Document Detective electronic document security scanner does include filters that will turn off the Tracked Changes feature and remove all of the Tracked Changes stored in the document.

For more information on this incident, please visit:

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-edits19may19,0,5192712,print.story?coll=la-home-headlines>

Please feel free to forward this message to other Government personnel you believe would benefit from this information.

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