

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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### **“FITARA 9.0”**

**House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on Government Operations**

**2:00 PM, Wednesday December 11, 2019**

**2154 Rayburn House Office Building**

**Chairman Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)**

Since the enactment of the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) in 2014, this Subcommittee has maintained steady and bipartisan oversight of agency implementation of the law. The benefits of this continued oversight are clear: across the government, agencies have improved federal information technology acquisition.

In fact, the FITARA Scorecard’s success has led this Subcommittee to incorporate other aspects of federal IT into the grades. Our framework is not rigid. This Subcommittee has augmented and changed the scorecard to take cognizance of other important components of federal IT, such as cybersecurity, and incorporated other constructive feedback from agencies. Today, the scorecard incorporates grades adapted from three additional pieces of legislation, including the MEGABYTE Act, the Modernizing Government Technology (MGT) Act, and the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA). The bottom line is that the FITARA scorecard works and continues to hold agencies accountable for implementing the best IT practices. The evidence is visible today.

In November 2015, the average FITARA grade was a “D” across all participating agencies. Over the past four years, agencies have incorporated new, sometimes challenging metrics and higher stakes, and yet, the average overall agency grade today is trending up – now above a “C.” The witnesses from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) model this progress. In the eighth scorecard from June 2019, DHS and NASA received the worst grades of all agencies, a “D-.” While there is still room for growth, the Chief Information Officers (CIOs) here today should be recognized for their progress. In the ninth FITARA scorecard, DHS receives a “B” and NASA a “C+.”

Unfortunately for some agencies, and in some categories, progress has slowed. Today, I hope to hear from our witnesses and GAO about what it takes to move beyond these hurdles to ensure efficient IT acquisition and management practices. We must continue to see the dividends from putting resources towards modernizing legacy IT systems, migrating to the cloud, and maintaining a strong cyber posture.

This Subcommittee recognizes that each agency has unique attributes. Agencies vary greatly in their personnel and budget size, and in the number of missions, components, and programs that fall within their purview. Large, federated agencies such as DHS and NASA likely face additional challenges when implementing the best IT practices across their enterprise because of this complexity.

Despite these challenges, improvements are possible. Progress in federal IT takes political will, and the recognition that the CIO needs a seat at the leadership table and a critical role in an agency's management decisions. Both DHS and NASA scorecards reflect increased grades given their agencies' commitments to give the CIO direct reporting access to the head of the agency. Ms. Wynn, I was pleased to see that NASA recently reversed course on its reporting structure to give you direct access to Administrator Bridenstine. We will talk about that more later in this hearing.

With the ninth scorecard, our Subcommittee acknowledges that some other agencies have taken a step toward direct reporting structure. DHS, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Department of Treasury received partial credit this cycle for having a direct report to the head of the agency and indirect reporting to an Undersecretary or Assistant Administrator for Management, for the purposes of consultation. For DHS, the authority to drive change in IT practices across the entire department is of the utmost importance. The DHS IG has reported on numerous IT deficiencies in components like the Federal Emergency Management Agency that hindered the agency's recovery operations following the catastrophic hurricanes and wildfires of 2017. The DHS CIO must have the access and authority to help the Secretary and individual components make IT decisions that solve these mission-critical issues and ensure our government can serve those in need.

Finally, I'd like to take some time to reflect on the actions of this Administration regarding the data center consolidation. At our last hearing, the Federal CIO, Suzette Kent, testified that she would continue the push for aggressive data center closures in the Office of Management and Budget's revised Data Center Optimization Initiative (DCOI) policy. At the time, I commended her commitment to this important effort. Today, however, I remain concerned about OMB's DCOI guidance regarding data centers.

In June, OMB released new agency data center guidance that changed the entire baseline for how agencies define and count data centers. Just one year ago, agencies reported on more than 4,700 data centers that they planned to continue to operate. In the 2019 data center inventory, however, this number dropped by nearly 50% to 2,400 data centers. And yet, we don't think this demonstrates progress. OMB appears to have made a definitional change without justification – and perhaps, an accounting trick. I also question whether OMB's narrow definition of a data center leaves out facilities that the government should still be tracking even if these data centers are not candidates for consolidation or closures. Data centers remain a cybersecurity vulnerability, and we cannot simply write off the risk because OMB decided to change the standard to artificially show progress.

These agency metrics and results fail to meet the “aggressive” goals for data center consolidation that FITARA intended and that Ms. Kent promised. I look forward to seeing the results of GAO’s forthcoming 2020 report on the Administration’s new data center policy. I intend to hold OMB accountable for setting suitable agency goals on data center closures and ensuring consistency and accuracy in agency tracking of their data centers over time.

Finally, I want to thank our witnesses for appearing here today to discuss their progress and plans to continue best practices in federal IT management. I would like to recognize that we, for the first time in FITARA history, have an all-female panel. These three women are leading their agencies in an area that has historically been male-dominated. Let’s hope that continues.

The stakes for proper FITARA implementation are high. When executed well, government information technology can produce savings and efficiencies, provide a better customer experience, and improve government’s knowledge and decision making. The benefits of effective IT in federal agencies are too great to ignore, and this Subcommittee will not waiver in its oversight of IT acquisition and management principles.

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