

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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### Opening Statement

#### Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly

#### Subcommittee Government Operations

#### *“Reviewing Challenges in Federal IT Acquisition”*

Thank you Chairman Hurd, Chairman Meadows, and Ranking Member Kelly, for holding this hearing to examine the challenges our government is facing when it comes to information technology (IT) acquisitions. As I have pointed out on several occasions, the federal government lags behind the private sector in many aspects of IT modernization, and the management of IT investments is no exception.

As the Ranking Member of the Government Operations Subcommittee, I have worked to introduce and pass several types of legislation that were aimed directly at fixing these shortcomings, most notably, the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (Pub.L. 113-291, FITARA), or as it is commonly called, “Issa-Connolly.” Since the passage of FITARA, our subcommittees have issued three biennial scorecards to ensure that it is properly implemented, as I firmly believe this legislation will provide agencies with greater support for making the necessary improvements in how they buy and deploy technology.

It is rather unfortunate that instead of providing agencies with additional tools to strengthen their management of IT acquisitions, President Trump has issued a hiring freeze that would make it difficult for agencies to improve in this area. A talented and highly skilled federal workforce is needed to tackle the difficult challenge of modernizing our federal IT.

A hiring freeze does nothing, but hurt agencies in their efforts to recruit and retain individuals with the knowledge, skills, and experience to successfully manage many of today’s most complex IT investments. When even the private sector reports facing a critical challenge in hiring qualified IT and cyber security professionals, it is difficult to see how a hiring freeze would do anything, but make the current situation our government faces worse, not better.

The irony is the hiring freeze comes at a time when the President just announced yesterday the creation of a new office, the White House Office of American Innovation. According to the *Washington Post*, one of the key areas that this new White House Office of American Innovation would be responsible for handling would be, and I quote, “modernizing the technology and data infrastructure of every federal department and agency.” In 1982, the GAO

determined that federal hiring freezes instituted by Former Presidents Carter and Reagan were not effective and, “disrupted agency operations, and in some cases, increased costs to the Government.”

Now, unless Jared Kushner plans on running the government’s entire IT modernization out of the West Wing, it’s safe to say they will need people to actually do the work. But if we cannot hire the many highly skilled IT architects, programmers, and computer engineers that would be needed to carry out the work of the White House Office of American Innovation, it is difficult to see how we can accomplish urgent technology reforms.

I am also concerned about another area that is critical to the ability of agencies to more efficiently manage their IT, the further consolidation of data centers. GAO states, and I quote, “consolidating data centers could potentially save the federal government billions of dollars.”

GAO reports that since 2011, the federal government has closed 4,388 of the 9,995 data centers in operation, and achieved savings of approximately \$1.6 billion. While this is a good start, as GAO points out in its high-risk report, weaknesses continue to exist in the government’s data center consolidation effort. In particular, GAO reports, and I quote, “planned savings may be understated because of difficulties agencies encountered when calculating savings and communicating their estimates to OMB.” To ensure that agencies continue to make sufficient progress in data center consolidation, OMB and Congress will need to increase their oversight in this area to help agencies achieve cost savings. FITARA sunsets its data center consolidation authorities in 2018. The GAO has suggested that there are data center consolidation savings still on the table. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the potential benefits of an extension to data center consolidation and other FITARA-related authorities.

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