

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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### Opening Statement of Congressman Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11) Ranking Member of the Government Operations Subcommittee

### Joint Hearing of the Subcommittee on Government Operations & the Subcommittee on Information Technology

### *The Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act's Role in Reducing IT Acquisition Risk*

June 10, 2015

I thank the Committee for holding today's important hearing to examine the implementation of the bipartisan Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act, better known as 'FITARA' or 'Issa-Connolly.' FITARA is the first major reform of the laws governing Federal information technology (IT) management since enactment of the seminal Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996.

I want to take a moment to recognize the leadership of former Congressman Bill Clinger and former Senator William Cohen, two luminaries of good government who served our Nation with honor and distinction. Today, there is widespread agreement that the text of the Clinger-Cohen Act was actually quite good and that the 1996 law held the *potential* to be truly transformative legislation with respect to modernizing Federal IT management.

However, in retrospect, it is clear that the Clinger-Cohen Act, while establishing a solid statutory foundation, fell short of achieving its full potential. There is also a consensus that the primary weakness of Clinger-Cohen was *not* the bill itself, but rather the Act's botched implementation, which was exacerbated by the absence of congressional oversight; the latter being an unfortunate result of both authors departing Congress shortly after the law's enactment.

That is why today's oversight hearing is so critical. With the history of Clinger-Cohen in mind, and as the co-author of FITARA, I am committed to doing everything in my power to guarantee that we do not repeat the implementation mistakes of the 1990s with FITARA. Make no mistake, the most important principle that agencies should take away from this proceeding is this: FITARA implementation will not be Clinger-Cohen 2.0.

Congress is diligently monitoring FITARA implementation, and we will not accept unnecessary delays, improper half-measures, and the stubborn preservation of the status quo.

Fortunately, it appears that the Administration is on the same page, and I am pleased that FITARA implementation has gotten off to a tremendous start. I want to commend the leadership of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), including our excellent witnesses testifying today, the Honorable Anne Rung and Mr. Tony Scott.

In many respects, the FITARA guidance is one of the finest policy publications OMB has ever produced. From its excellent content, to the collaborative nature in which it was developed, to the innovative and transparent manner in which it was published, OMB's efforts to implement FITARA truly represent a best practice and new milestone in good government.

Since FITARA's enactment, the Administration has demonstrated that it fully recognizes the importance of effective implementation. As OMB noted in its proposed guidance, FITARA "...is a historic law that represents the first major overhaul of Federal information technology (IT) in almost 20 years." Further, this renewed emphasis on the importance of Federal IT management will complement and strengthen President Obama's "Smarter IT Delivery" initiative, which the President designated as a Priority Goal for the entire Federal Government.

I am also pleased that the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recognizes FITARA's potential to achieve billions of dollars in cost-savings and cost-avoidances by strengthening agency CIO authorities, facilitating best practices in IT management, and promoting the elimination of wasteful and duplicative IT systems. At a February 2015 hearing held by this Committee, the Honorable Gene Dodaro, Comptroller General of the United States, explained GAO's rationale behind designating "Improving the Management of IT Acquisitions and Operations" as a new government-wide high-risk area, stating, "...one of the reasons that we put IT acquisitions and operations on the list is in order to elevate attention to make sure that FITARA, Issa-Connolly bill, is implemented effectively."

Moving forward, there is bipartisan and bicameral support for fully implementing FITARA. The vast majority of Members share our goal of dramatically curbing wasteful IT spending on antiquated IT systems; and want to promote management practices that will prevent agencies from wasting billions of taxpayer dollars on boondoggles that fall years behind schedule, and pair staggeringly poor performance with shockingly high costs.

There is also recognition that Federal policymakers and agency administrators must cease relegating IT management to the proverbial cellar of an agency's organizational hierarchy. Lawmakers must stop routinely passing legislation that takes for granted the ability of government to effectively execute complex IT solutions, and agencies can no longer neglect the need for strong IT leadership and oversight.

The bottom line is that FITARA's enactment represents the long-overdue recognition that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, effective governance is inextricably linked with how well government leverages technology to better serve its citizens. This reality of modern government underscores why it is incumbent upon the Legislative and Executive Branches of Government to work together in a pragmatic fashion to ensure that agencies prioritize effective FITARA implementation, and Congress does everything it can to support these efforts.

In closing, I want to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the leadership of both OMB and GAO in elevating the importance of FITARA implementation. In particular, I am grateful to the respective OMB and GAO staff members for their dedication and hard work. Congressional oversight of Federal IT would be lost at sea without the critical support of GAO, and in the case of the FITARA guidance that is being finalized today; OMB – with assistance from stakeholders such as Mr. Spires – has produced one of the finest implementation documents that I have reviewed during my tenure in public service.

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