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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)

Joint hearing host by the Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Subcommittee on IT: “DATA Act Implementation”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding a hearing that represents the kind of oversight this Committee does well when we do it on a bipartisan basis, as we have done on a number of federal IT issues. Today we revisit the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act, which this Committee supported in a bipartisan basis and was signed into law two years ago. The DATA Act, if properly implemented, will bring enhanced transparency to federal spending that will in turn lead to better decision making.

Agencies will now be required to report spending at a more granular level and that data is to be communicated using a common language that will enable true comparisons across the federal government. Agencies, Congress, and watchdogs inside and outside of the government will now able to connect the dots on how agencies are spending, which will help identify duplication and waste -- something the Committee examined last week with the annual GAO Duplication report. The DATA Act holds great potential for creating efficiencies across the government and for realizing savings.

While the Office of Management and Budget and the Treasury Department continue to make progress on defining those new standards, a recent GAO report notes that some definitions may require

additional work as they could lead to inconsistent reporting. I look forward to hearing how those concerns are being addressed, and I also want to hear more about the status of the pilot program to reduce the reporting burden on the recipients of federal grants and contracts.

The DATA Act directed OMB to create a pilot program to streamline such reporting. For the grantee program, OMB partnered with the Department of Health and Human Services, and it is working with General Services Administration on the contracting portion. The law also calls for input from a diverse group of federal award recipients. However, GSA and OMB have yet to present a detailed plan to achieve this. As a Member representing a number of federal grant recipients and contractors, I want to hear how OMB plans to better engage those communities in this effort. I am hopeful that as the pilot moves forward specific grantees and contractors will have the opportunity test the proposals that agencies might use reduce duplicative or unnecessarily burdensome reporting.

While the design of the grants pilot program appears to be on track, I am concerned by the GAO's assessment that OMB is taking a more narrow approach with respect to the contractor portion focused on certified payroll reporting. For example, the GAO said, "the plan did not include specific information on the methodology, strategy, or types of data to be collected. Further, scalability was not addressed to result in recommendations that could be applied government-wide. The design also did not indicate how data will be evaluated to draw conclusions." At this point, the procurement portion of the pilot is at risk of not meeting the 12-month reporting cycle deadline.

These new DATA Act reporting requirements for agencies are not scheduled to be implemented until May 2017, so today's hearing is the perfect opportunity to look at what's working so far and those areas that might need more work a year out from that deadline.

As my colleagues know, I was pleased to co-author the bipartisan Federal IT Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA), which GAO, in its 2015 report on duplicative and wasteful spending, said, and I quote, “should improve the transparency and management of IT acquisitions and operations across the government.” I think the DATA Act and FITARA will complement each other and help agencies make smarter investments.

The DATA Act holds tremendous potential. I look forward to hearing from today’s witnesses any suggestions they might have for ensuring we realize that potential and stay on course.

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