

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
MINORITY (202) 225-5074
<https://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement of Chairman Gerald E. Connolly Hearing on “FITARA 13.0” January 20, 2022

For the past six years, this Subcommittee has maintained steady and bipartisan oversight of agency implementation of FITARA—the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act, in addition to other critical IT-related statutes and executive branch IT priorities incorporated into the bi-annual FITARA Scorecard. We have provided vigorous oversight. In practice, the FITARA Scorecard is a tool for Congress, Chief Information Officers (CIOs), agency heads, and outside stakeholders to understand how federal agencies across the enterprise of government are performing in various IT acquisition categories.

Since the Scorecard was first released in 2015, it has driven positive change in information technology system acquisition and management across 24 federal agencies, and it is estimated by GAO that it has saving taxpayers more than \$20 billion and improving the security of federal IT systems. There aren’t a lot of other bills that have saved the federal government that much money.

This Subcommittee, regardless of who is in the majority, has held more oversight hearings on FITARA in the last seven years than on any other federal piece of legislation. As we will hear today from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Scorecard has served as an effective oversight tool since its very inception. From November 2015 through December 2021, agencies receiving C or higher grades increased from 29 to 100 percent and for the most recent scorecard, 50 percent of agencies received an A or B.

To continue driving progress, the Scorecard needs to evolve to reflect the changing nature of IT services and to guarantee we are accurately assessing the modernization and IT management practices of federal agencies. The goal here is to incentivize progress, not to get a gold star on our foreheads. At today’s hearing, the Subcommittee will hear diverse perspectives on the Scorecard, including opportunities to upgrade its categories and metrics for a more focused and objective measurement of agencies’ performance.

Since the July 2021 FITARA 12.0 Scorecard, seven agencies’ overall grades increased, four decreased, and 13 remained unchanged. These grades resulted in all agencies receiving a passing “C” or higher grade for this round Scorecard.

In the data center consolidation category, every agency received an “A” grade based on the Scorecard’s current methodology. As such, the 14th Scorecard will retire this methodology when it is released later this year. Today, the Subcommittee grades agencies using each agency’s quarterly data center submission to the Office of Management and Budget and weights that data center grade according to the Subcommittee’s priorities. I want to congratulate agencies for getting all “As” in this category. But that is not to be construed as a “Mission Accomplished” moment by any means. Given the Subcommittee’s oversight history on federal data center consolidation, we approach this accomplishment with a bit of a jaundice eye. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on ways the Subcommittee can continue to hold agencies accountable for efficient data center consolidation and transition to the cloud.

The data center consolidation category is one example of a larger trend that points to the need to upgrade the Scorecard. While no agencies have earned an “F” grade since 2018, on average, less than 10% of agencies are achieving an “A” grade, and 53% are showing no change to their overall grade over time. That’s not progress.

Agencies appear to be less motivated to improve their grades – perhaps because of the methodology used to calculate some of the metrics. For example, two of the metrics are graded on a curve, which can be received as counterproductive to an agencies’ ability to demonstrate improvement during the Scorecard cycle.

A variety of factors, including methodology, data availability, agency motivation, and the cycle of the Scorecard, have resulted in stalling grades for many agencies. The Subcommittee is at an inflection point, and the time is ripe to modernize this oversight tool.

The federal government spends more than \$100 billion each year on IT investments. GAO has found that, historically, the projects supported by these investments have often incurred “multi-million-dollar cost overruns and years-long schedule delays.” In addition, they may contribute little to mission-related outcomes and, in some cases, fail altogether. Congress enacted FITARA on December 19, 2014, to ensure focused discipline and consistently effective management and to codify existing administrative initiatives to improve federal IT managed by Federal CIOs.

Key pillars of the FITARA Scorecard—including cybersecurity and IT modernization—remain on GAO’s high-risk list, highlighting the need for vigorous and continued oversight of these issues. To conduct such oversight effectively, the FITARA Scorecard must accurately reflect the progress agencies have actually made in their IT efforts, which will in turn motivate agencies to prioritize meaningful changes.

This Subcommittee is prepared to lead the way on FITARA’s evolution. Expected updates to agency IT data reporting requirements and upcoming revisions to the IT Dashboard provide an opportunity for us to enhance and upgrade the Scorecard itself. Moreover, FITARA 13.0 marks only the third time in the Scorecard’s history when government had only two acting CIOs (Department of Interior and Department of Health and Human Services), so we have a cadre of permanent CIOs whom we count on as trusted partners in driving transformational change through improvements in agency IT systems.

Congress must use metrics that empower and incentivize CIOs to improve federal IT. And we must collectively avoid bureaucratic gaming by cherry-picking metrics that enable agencies to inaccurately inflate their performance. Because the goal is to capture real progress or not. It’s not to get a gold star on the forehead by playing games with the metrics, nor is it to get a scarlet letter on our back because we failed to meet some goals. We want to better capture how are we doing, how can we improve, what do you need.

Finally, this Subcommittee will not waiver in its continued oversight of agencies’ IT acquisition and management. We must continue to reap dividends from modernizing legacy IT systems, migrating to the cloud, and maintaining a strong cyber posture. Congress and this Administration must work together to prioritize IT modernization and cybersecurity across the federal government to maintain our commitments to everyone we serve, especially now during a pandemic.

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Contact: Nelly Decker, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181