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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Chairman Gerald E. Connolly Subcommittee on Government Operations Hearing “FITARA 12.0” July 28, 2021

For the past six years, this Subcommittee has maintained steady and bipartisan oversight of agency implementation of the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA), in addition to other critical IT laws incorporated into the bi-annual FITARA Scorecard. This Scorecard holds agencies accountable for improving their IT postures. In practice, the Scorecard is a tool for Congress and the public to ensure better cybersecurity, reduce wasteful spending, and make government service to the nation more effective.

Throughout this pandemic, we have come to realize how vital agile IT and strong IT governance are to the success of the federal government in meeting the needs of the people we serve.

Today’s hearing will discuss the results of the twelfth iteration of the FITARA Scorecard. This hearing will also focus on how Congress and the Administration can work together to improve services to this nation. It will examine how we can effectively modernize IT across the federal government, including making changes to administration guidance and adding new oversight metrics to the Scorecard to hold agencies accountable for transforming how government does business.

Today, we will also hear for the first time from the new Federal Chief Information Officer, Clare Martorana, about the Administration’s federal IT priorities, including how it plans to administer the recent \$1 billion that Congress allocated to the Technology Modernization Fund. Additionally, we will hear her how she plans to prioritize projects to retire legacy federal IT systems, accelerate agencies’ transition to emerging technologies, and improve federal cybersecurity. The fact that Ms. Martorana is here today, is a clear indication that the Biden Administration recognizes the significance of FITARA and federal IT investments.

Since the December 2020 Scorecard, four agencies’ FITARA Scorecard grades increased, two decreased, and 18 remained unchanged. Nearly all agencies received a passing grade. Unfortunately for some agencies – and in some categories – progress has slowed. I hope to hear from our witnesses and OMB about transcending the hurdles to improved IT and to ensure efficient IT acquisition and management practices. We must continue to strive for the dividends reaped from modernizing legacy IT systems, migrating to the cloud, and maintaining a strong cyber posture.

Despite a few backslides, this Scorecard demonstrates continued improvements in many categories. Since the Scorecard’s inception in 2015, agencies have made substantial, positive strides in improving their information technology practices. For example, historically, agencies have reported that poor-performing projects are often broadly scoped and aim to deliver functionality several years after initiation. FITARA, however, requires agency CIOs to ensure that IT investments are adequately implementing incremental development practices and that functionality is timely. Since 2015, the portion of agencies’ IT projects implemented incrementally has risen from 58% to 78%.

Among the FITARA Scorecard categories with the greatest impact on taxpayer savings is the IT portfolio review process, known as PortfolioStat. Since 2015, the amount of money agencies have reportedly saved, including the costs they have avoided as a result of their PortfolioStat efforts, has risen from \$3.4 billion to \$23.5 billion. This increase includes \$1.3 billion related to eliminating duplicative software licenses and about \$7 billion on data center consolidation. This Subcommittee continues to have reservations on the previous Administration’s narrowed definition of data centers and the implications this has on congressional oversight and the cybersecurity vulnerabilities of the federal government. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how we can continue to save taxpayer dollars while also ensuring agencies improve and fortify their IT infrastructures to better serve the public.

In addition to modernizing and acquiring the right technology, agencies must fill the skills gaps in IT positions across the federal government. Our federal IT workforce is rapidly aging into retirement. As of March 2021, 3.3% of the federal government's full-time IT employees were under the age of 30, and 52.5% were over the age of 50. Federal agencies must focus on recruiting and hiring young IT professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to address the technology challenges of tomorrow.

At the very first FITARA hearing, former Department of Transportation CIO Richard McKinney stated, "IT is no longer just the business of the CIO. Rather, IT is everybody's business." Never has this been clearer than in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, where IT saved thousands of lives by enabling telework and keeping the government and the economy running.

We have seen firsthand how the agencies that continued to use outdated IT during the pandemic struggled to serve the people who rely on them. Some agencies remain mired in backlogs, including the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) – which failed to digitize critical veterans' records. The Archives now reports a years-long backlog in providing veterans access to records that qualify them for medical treatment, unemployment assistance, home loans, and student loans. That's why I joined Ranking Member Hice in urging the National Archivist to apply for IT modernization funds – so government can keep its commitments to our nation's veterans. Unfortunately, NARA is not the only federal agency plagued by legacy IT. Congress and this Administration must work together to prioritize IT modernization across the federal government to maintain our commitments to everyone we serve.

With the Delta variant on the rise across the country, and vaccinations flatlining, the stakes for effectively implementing FITARA are higher than ever. When executed well, government IT modernization can ensure the efficient delivery of critical services, improve the government's knowledge and decision-making, and save lives. When executed poorly, it can lead to outright failures in serving the American people when they need the government the most. Simply put, the fate of the world's largest economy rises and falls with the ability of government IT systems to deliver in an emergency.

The importance of federal agencies' effective use of IT is too great to ignore, and this Subcommittee will not waiver in its continued oversight of agencies' IT acquisition and management. We need our CIOs to succeed. FITARA remains an effective tool to empower these CIOs and catalyze IT improvements across the enterprise of the federal government. Let's ensure we evolve in ways that continue to raise the bar and serve this nation.

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