

IT Reform Bill Introduced in Senate

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Riding on the heels of the Healthcare.gov debacle, Sens. Tom Udall (D-NM) and Jerry Moran (R-KS) introduced legislation on Tuesday, December 17th, that would overhaul the way the federal government buys and manages IT products and services.

The Federal Information Technology Savings, Accountability, and Transparency Act (S.1843) parallels the FITARA legislation awaiting action from the full House. By some estimates, the House legislation could save taxpayers as much as \$20 billion annually by fundamentally reforming the way federal agencies purchase IT. If passed, either version of the legislation would be the most significant reform to the IT acquisition landscape since the 2002 E-Government Act and the 1996 Clinger Cohen Act, which created the agency CIO function.

Both the Senate and House bills mandate only one CIO per agency who would be accountable for IT within their agency. Additionally, both bills support more transparency for IT investments. The House bill shifts all authority for IT spending to the CIO. The Senate version would give CIOs responsibility for COTS products and heavy influence over other IT budget decisions. The House bill establishes Assisted Acquisition Centers of Excellence to promote best acquisition practices and supplement the IT acquisition workforce where needed. CIOs would have hiring authority for IT staff in the Senate bill.

"The federal government needs to be able to build cutting-edge, 21st century computer systems, but right now we are hobbled by laws written in the days of floppy disks and telephone modems," Udall said.

Both bills were introduced as amendments to the House and Senate versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), but neither made it to the final bill which is awaiting Senate action.

Udall and Moran are using the flawed rollout of the Healthcare.gov website as a platform to promote their legislation and prompt quick Congressional action.

The White House has not publicly commented on either IT reform legislation. However, federal CIO Steve VanRoekel has said that giving CIOs a major role in IT decision making is more important than budget authority.

The Senate bill was referred to the Committee of Homeland Security and Government Affairs.