

New RFP-IT Legislation Grants CTO Authority

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FITARA, FITSATA, and now RFP-IT appear as vegetable soup to many outside of the beltway, but all are legislative attempts to improve federal IT acquisition, implementation and management. Representatives Ann Eshoo (D-CA) and Gerry Connolly (D-VA) began floating the Reforming Federal Procurement of Information Technology Act (RFP-IT Act) this week, which would give the U.S. CTO powers over government IT projects.

The proposed **RFP-IT legislation** would establish a Digital Government Office (DGO), headed by the U.S. CTO, which would review all agency proposals for IT projects focused on citizen services or are determined to have high development, operating or maintenance costs. The DGO would decide whether to manage the project, assist the agency with management of the project, or direct the agency to management project on its own.

The DGO would be funded by fees collected from executive agencies on government-wide IT IDIQ contracts, GWACS and GSA Schedules. Five percent of agency fees collected from these contracts would go to a new DGO Fund.

It's unclear whether current Federal CTO Todd Park would be slated to move into the newly created U.S. CTO position. Additionally, I found any mention of the role of the Federal CIO, strangely absent from the proposed legislation. And what about CTO purview over existing "major" IT projects?

The draft RFP-IT Act follows on the heels of FITSATA, introduced in the Senate in December, and Congressman Issa's FITARA legislation which has been making its rounds for over a year. A Connolly spokesman stated that the RFP-IT bill and FITARA complement one another and are not competing legislation.

In the wake of Healthcare.gov, Congress seems ready to act on IT reform legislation. However to date, much of the legislation and proposed reform has centered around additional reporting and oversight rather than more authority and action. FITARA proposes more budget power for CIOs, but for the most part requires additional reporting and transparency into IT projects and spending. But is this the answer to fixing ailing IT programs and acquisitions?

The IT Dashboard was meant to help mitigate risk in federal IT programs and it has increased visibility and garnered success. But as GAO points out in its most recent review of the IT Dashboard, "the Dashboard was not updated for 15 of the past 24 months." GAO recommended that OMB make Dashboard information available independent of the budget process and appropriately address identified IT investment weaknesses.

In another example, the House Veterans Affairs Committee continues to pressure the VA over security of veterans data and systems. Currently, the committee has 111 outstanding requests for information since June 2012. Are all of these unanswered requests for information solving the problem?

Eshoo and Connolly's legislation is less about transparency and reporting, and is more about authority. To date additional reporting requirements have not solved the problem. Could increased CTO power and control be part of the answer?