

# Is More Power in the Hands of the CIO the Real Answer?

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Most of the buzz around the Federal IT Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) to date has been positive, from both government and industry. However, in late July there were indications that the White House might not support the legislation. In addition, former commissioner of GSA's Federal Technology Service wrote an FCW article expressing the possible downside of shifting all IT control to the CIO.

FITARA would make CIOs presidential appointees reporting to the agency head, and grant them personnel and budget authority for IT. The legislation would codify many of the administration's current IT initiatives, such as data center consolidation and promotion of strategic sourcing. However, FITARA provisions lack coverage for the Defense Department.

Bob Woods, president of Topside Consulting Group and former commissioner of GSA's Federal Technology Service, doubts that giving all IT authority to the CIO will solve problems. "How agencies will improve results by replacing a career CIO with one destined to last 27 months is baffling," Woods wrote in a recent FCW article. He believes in a team approach and allowing operations people closer to the missions to make decisions. Woods thinks FITARA is "doomed to fail, because it is attacking symptoms, not root causes."

Federal CIO Steve VanRoekel said in a Federal News Radio interview, "I think it's (FITARA) good, but I don't know if it goes far enough." For the most part, VanRoekel and the administration have been mum regarding FITARA. The legislation was attached as an amendment to the House version of the 2014 Defense Authorization Act, but was not mentioned in the Statement of Administration Policy issued on the bill.

Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA) offered a rather blunt call for administration support of the bill during a hearing of the House subcommittee on Government Operations last week. "It is the friendlies, the most sympathetic bill you will get out of Congress. It is, in large measure, a codification in fact, of initiatives and reforms undertaken by the administration. But, if the administration decides to spurn this legislation that has passed the House already, you are going to have problems on both sides of the aisle."

In order for FITARA to become law, it would first need to pass the Senate. The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee just passed its version of the Defense Authorization Bill in early June, but to date there has been no public discussion of adding FITARA as an amendment. If the legislation passed the Senate, it would then go to the president for signature.