



DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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**STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, INFORMATION POLICY,
INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS AND THE CENSUS
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

July 21, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the role and responsibilities of Federal Chief Information Officers. With the Clinger-Cohen Act (P.L. 104-106) for our guide, I have been one of many Federal executives working to improve our government's management of our information and IT resources. While we have many more miles to go, I am proud of what we as a community have achieved and I hope my perspective will add value to our discussion this afternoon. With your permission, I will submit my written testimony for the record.

My Personal Background

As background to my comments today, I would like to share with you a brief history of my IT and general management experiences. Today, I appear before you honored to serve as the Chief Information Officer (CIO) of the U.S. Department of the Treasury. I began working in this position on June 7 of this year. Prior to joining the Treasury Department, I served as the first Deputy CIO of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), starting in June of 1997. In my seven years in this position at USDA, I worked for and with three politically appointed CIOs. In between these appointments, I also served as the Acting CIO for a total duration of

approximately one and half years. At the bureau or agency level, my IT management experience includes five years as Director of the Information Systems and Communications Division of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. In addition to these IT experiences, I served as the Director of the USDA Office of Operations with overall responsibility for management of the four building headquarters complex and the departmental procurement program, and worked in human resources management early on in my career.

In addition to these day jobs, for the past four years, I have been a member of the Federal CIO Council Executive Committee and Co-chair of the Council's Human Capital and IT Committee, which continues working to improve the recruitment, retention, and skills of the Federal government's IT workforce.

Executive Leadership

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) report that is being released today very clearly lays out the basic questions on the responsibilities, reporting relationship, tenure and challenges of Federal CIOs. It also documents the commonly held beliefs of most current and former Federal CIOs on these issues. In short, managing information and IT in government is not rocket science but it is challenging and complex.

To be a successful Federal CIO, one must practice executive leadership, which by definition includes strong management and communication skills. Fundamentally, I believe these qualities are more important than whether a CIO should be a political appointee or career civil servant, or whether an effective CIO must have a strong technical background. In general, I value common sense over technical expertise. The major challenges identified by GAO (i.e. implementing effective IT management, obtaining sufficient and relevant resources, communication and collaboration, and managing change) are not technical challenges; addressing and overcoming them requires seasoned and skilled leadership.

Responsibilities

I concur with almost all of the responsibilities the Clinger-Cohen Act (CCA) assigns to Federal CIOs. Given the significant investment dollars and program impact of Federal IT systems, information and IT management must be the single main responsibility of Federal CIOs. Unfortunately, in my experience, there is never enough time or capacity to simultaneously focus on all the CCA responsibilities equally. Meeting the challenge of implementing effective information and IT management means a CIO – like all executives – must prioritize amongst competing responsibilities. Adding non-IT related demands to a CIO's position description further dilutes the time and effort they can spend on the many pressing IT initiatives.

Reporting Relationship

In order to achieve the worthy goals of the CCA, it is critical that a Federal CIO report directly to their Secretary or his/her proxy. First, successful business process modernization efforts require considerable institutional changes. Complete support from the top is needed to drive major change initiatives. Second, in my experience, effective information and IT management requires

working on an equal footing with the business process owners. CIOs must hold their business leaders – as the owners of the systems that support their programs – accountable for success throughout a system’s lifecycle. I can think of no examples of a successful IT program where the CIO does not have a strong reporting relationship to the department or agency/bureau head.

Tenure

The GAO reports that current and former CIOs commonly cited three to five years as the time needed to be effective. In my view, three years is the absolute minimum term required to be a very effective CIO.

One Model for Managing the Challenges Faced by Federal CIOs

Like all Federal executives, CIOs face a host of competing challenges from managing an aging workforce, to meeting unfunded program mandates, to managing change. In their interviews, GAO identified one mechanism to ensure continued attention to ongoing objectives when there is a hiatus between one CIO and the next, a strong Deputy CIO. In addition to providing for continuity and complementing the skills of a CIO, a good Deputy CIO can shorten the learning curve for a new CIO. A skilled Deputy CIO can also free the CIO to focus on high priority outward facing initiatives while the Deputy CIO serves as the chief operating officer, making sure all the trains are running. This was the model during my term as Deputy CIO at the Department of Agriculture; I believe it was a successful one.

Conclusion

Today, we continue to improve the management of the Federal Government’s information and information technology. We have more visibility into where our IT dollars are being spent than in the past due to established IT Capital Planning and Investment Control processes and a renewed focus on project management. While we are facing an increasing number of cyber security threats, we are also devoting significantly more resources to protecting our information and IT assets. A large part of our progress is due to the statutory framework laid out by Congress in the CCA and related legislation, the aggressive implementation of these laws by the Office of Management and Budget, and the maturing role of the Federal CIO.