

**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, INFORMATION POLICY,  
INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS AND THE CENSUS  
CONGRESSMAN ADAM PUTNAM, CHAIRMAN**



**OVERSIGHT HEARING  
STATEMENT BY ADAM PUTNAM, CHAIRMAN**

Hearing topic: *“Federal Electronic Records Management: What is the Plan? What is our Progress?”*

Tuesday, July 8, 2003  
10:00 a.m.  
Room 2154 Rayburn House Office Building

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OPENING STATEMENT

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In today’s world of emerging technology, Federal agencies are conducting more and more of their business through electronic means. As an example, e-mail has become a primary form of communication, often used now in place of the telephone, and as a vehicle for sending memos or other important documents. While this has increased the efficiency and productivity of the modern day office, it has also presented a new set of challenges to the issue of records management and preservation as the federal government moves from being primarily paper based to more and more use of electronic and technology-based tools.

The importance of records management and preservation has a long history. Not only is the legacy of our history at issue, but this issue has a direct impact on the continuing ability of the federal agencies to function properly. Without a comprehensive and cohesive strategy, records can be misplaced...or even lost. This not only has the potential to hinder day-to-day operations, but also has potentially significant ramifications on the national archival process. The management of all federal records...and now, particularly electronically generated records, creates new and additional challenges. Examples would include: what type of electronic records need to be saved?...What process or technology should be utilized for the preservation?...How will the retrieval of these records be guaranteed and through what process in the future?

This whole issues raises another set of questions as well...What happens with all of the existing records in their various formats?... How many, if any, of these existing records will be converted to an emerging process or technology?... How will all of these records and exhibits continue to be preserved?... How are these records being catalogued and what is the magnitude of the process required to retrieve an existing record?...How are classified versus non-classified records treated?

The Federal Records Act has provided the National Archives and Records Management Agency ( NARA ) with the responsibility for oversight of records management within the federal government. Under the provisions of FRA, NARA is to provide guidance and oversight to Federal agencies as they develop and execute and electronic records management strategy. Certainly, having a common set of goals and objectives in those strategies will insure consistency and continuity in this important process.

Presently, NARA is working to develop the necessary tools to support that guidance. A number of projects, including the development of their Electronic Records Archive ( ERA ) program and NARA's leadership role as a managing partner of the Electronic Records Management e-Government initiative, will put them in a position to help define the national standard for electronic records management.

Simultaneously, Federal agencies themselves must begin to work more diligently in making electronic records management a higher priority. Many agencies have not fulfilled their obligation to confer with NARA about the progress of their records management plans. While NARA has been charged with oversight responsibility regarding these important matters, they have been provided little, if any, authority to enforce compliance. As it currently stands, it is the responsibility of each individual agency to develop and implement an electronic records management strategy. One of the areas we will explore at this hearing today is whether the authority and accountability that presently exists related to this issue is sufficient to actually get the job done.

These are just some of the challenges facing the subject of Federal electronic records management. Through the research and preparation for this hearing, the Subcommittee has come to recognize the enormity of this task. It is our objective to learn from a variety of stakeholders...institutional, academic, government and private sector...and to work with NARA, together with Federal agencies, to determine the progress in developing and implementing an effective electronic records management strategy.