



Comment

## Are DOD CIOs on the endangered species list?

By David Wennergren

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You might think the Clinger Cohen Act is dead, and CIOs along with it, if you've been listening to some pundits discuss the recently released **Volume 3 Report** (<https://section809panel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Volume-3-Summary-of-Recommendations.pdf>) of the Advisory Panel on Streamlining and Codifying Acquisition Regulations, commonly referred to as the Section 809 panel.

Recommendation 44 of the new report states, "Exempt DOD from Clinger-Cohen Act provisions in Title 40," and this proclamation has prompted some to toll the death knell for CIOs within the Defense Department, and by extension, potentially other federal agencies as well.

The reality is different.

The 809 panel has now compiled three volumes of insightful recommendations designed to improve the acquisition process and outcomes at DOD. And it's important not to overstate the implications of the recommendation to do away with Clinger-Cohen.

At the heart of the panel's recommendation is the correct assertion that paper-based compliance processes, like the Clinger-Cohen compliance checklist, especially if done apart from DOD's very robust acquisition process, will not necessarily improve the agility, speed and effectiveness of IT acquisitions. The report also correctly notes that the world is a different place than it was in 1996, and numerous additional IT statutes, to include eGov, FISMA, FITARA and the Modernizing Government Technology Act have all been enacted since.

Even though some of these subsequent statutes have limited applicability to DOD, between legislative and executive branch guidance, to include the FY 2018 NDAA provision restoring the DOD CIO to a Senate-confirmed political appointment, DOD has the requisite authority for an empowered and highly effective CIO.

That said, the debate about the future of the CIO role is an important subject to consider. And, as I have written about previously in this space, some federal

organizations have seen shifts in the center of gravity for innovative new IT efforts with the addition of multiple new "chiefs," to include chief technology officers, chief data officers, chief information security officers, innovation officers and so on.

It's often easier to create new jobs when circumstances change than to modify or correct the role of an existing position, in this case the CIO.

And yet, as I noted last year, while some federal agencies are shifting responsibilities away from their CIO, **the role of the CIO in industry** (<https://fcw.com/articles/2018/04/27/comment-wennergren-cios.aspx>) has been increasing in influence by being the focal point for leading change; driving the adoption of digital solutions and new technologies, focusing on corporate strategy and being deeply engaged in improving business operations.

Given all these things, it's a good time to look inside your organization and see whether the role of CIO is focused on leveraging technology to deliver effective mission results, or has it drifted away from this focus in favor of compliance, certifications and checking of work done by others.

As the world continues to change, one fact remains true, a senior leader empowered to drive the adoption of new technologies to improve agency results remains crucially important. So rather than debate the continued applicability of a good piece of legislation written in the last millennium, we should instead focus on the following:

Does your organization have a designated executive empowered to drive the adoption of new technology to help improve the mission of your agency and deliver business results?

Does your information technology leader not just have a seat at the table, but a voice at the leadership table to help drive IT modernization, new technology adoption and business process optimization?

Is your organization focused on moving away from legacy IT solutions and instead, having a definitive preference for new technology solutions and leading practices that are changing the way we live, work and play?

And, are you using innovative acquisition approaches that allow your agency to stay ahead of the pace of technology change and embrace agile/modular approaches that proactively engage the customer?

The good news is that despite how you may have answered these questions, current acquisition regulations and IT legislation give you ample opportunity to move to "yes." And, with the successful adoption of the many good ideas presented by the 809 panel, there are even brighter days ahead for DOD.

With more than 20 years passed since Clinger-Cohen, it's a good time for Congress to also consider a re-look at the breadth of IT legislation that currently exists, with an eye to consolidated and updated language that reflects the reality of the technology marketplace today, deconflicts past guidance and empowers a senior information leader, at both DOD and civilian agencies, to take full advantage of the opportunities new technologies present to improve national security and the delivery of services to our citizens.

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#### About the Author

David Wennergren is CEO of the American Council for Technology and Industry Advisory Council (ACT-IAC), as well as a former federal agency CIO and former vice chair of the Federal CIO Council.