

Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
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Members of the House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, thank you all for this opportunity to share my observations and recommendations about the Department of Veterans' Affairs. I previously had the honor of testifying before this Committee in March, 2002 and submitted a written statement for your hearing held on May 22, 2006. I have worked with VA on their cyber security, enterprise architecture, project management, IT workforce, IT contingency planning and continuity of operations, as well as other efforts. I have done similar work for the Executive Office of the President, as well as many other public and private enterprises.

As for the question of whether security for data and information should be centralized at VA, my answer is simply "absolutely." Centralized IT security (meaning all personnel, dollars, policies, and other IT security resources) is essential to ensuring effective cyber security at VA. More than that is needed (including effective and engaged leadership and a concerted and consistent effort to change VA's culture of indifference), but without centralization cyber security at VA is doomed to failure (as recent events indicate).

It is like asking whether national security should be centralized. If not for the relative newness of digital information, and the relative slowness of human thinking processes to change, we would not be asking such questions. But like national security in the USA, IT centralization at VA cannot be about totalitarianism or dictatorship. It too should be centralization with representation. And as our own nation's history demonstrates, this can be successfully done.

As they have done in the past, VA's two major divisions (health care and financial services) will provide an abundance of reasons why centralization of IT security is not necessary or impractical. This is simply balderdash. Moreover, VA's history since the passage of Clinger-Cohn over a decade ago indicates that when left to their own devices they will not comply with laws or management directives regarding IT centralization. I am also aware that many efforts to unify VA's culture and/or operations have been subverted by VA in the past (for example, the OneVA effort and countless prior attempts to centralize IT and cyber security). This kind of behavior should not be tolerated by a US Congress that still holds VA's "purse strings."