

The Hill

Republican leaders boost DATA Act

By Adam Mazmanian Sep 10, 2013

A bill that would require the federal government to adhere to common data publishing standards got a high-profile plug from two senior House Republicans at the Data Transparency 2013 conference in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 10.

Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) and Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee and a sponsor of the Digital Accountability and Transparency (DATA) Act, touted the virtues of open data as a way of making the work of government more visible, and as a money saver in a tight fiscal environment.

Issa argued that sequestration adds to the urgency of the need for the DATA Act, which is getting a second look in Congress after failing in 2011. "Organizing and structuring data will save countless hundreds of millions of dollars in the short run, and in the long run will save billions of dollars," Issa said. Diminishing federal budgets, assuming sequestration stays in place, make it critical "to make the design-build investments that show you can in fact provide more information for less."

Cantor didn't go into detail about the DATA Act, but did announce that he intended to bring the bill, which won Oversight Committee approval in May, to the House floor once the Congressional Budget Office scores its budgetary impact. "Transparency to me means accountability. It means more eyeballs on the way that government operates, on its spending patterns," Cantor said. "It can end up yielding a more efficient federal government."

The legislation won bipartisan backing from the House panel, and Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.) introduced a companion bill in the Senate. Warner's bill is set to be taken up by the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs committee in October, according to committee counsel Jonathan Kraden.

Additionally, Issa announced that he was sending a letter to the Securities and Exchange Commission to follow up on the implementation of open data standards for companies filing financial reports. The SEC is supposed to collect company reports in an Extensible Business Reporting Language (XBRL), but according to Issa the process isn't fully automated and reports often have to be re-entered on the SEC side. "Only in government would 10-K [reports] delivered digitally be put on paper so they could be manually typed in so they could then be digitized," Issa said. "It sounds absurd, except it's really happening."

About the Author

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