This year, the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act began grading agencies on software licensing, and the Modernizing Government Technology Act passed as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. So, what’s next for government IT policy?

Rep. Will Hurd, R-Texas, has led these IT efforts as chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform IT Subcommittee. In terms of the evolution of FITARA, he told Government CIO Magazine he’s looking to turn it into a digital hygiene scorecard to identify and measure the key elements that drive good security.
For example, a fifth category in FITARA Scorecard 5.0 was added to assess agency management of software licenses by megabytes. It intends to ensure agencies know the hardware on their system, whether they’re doing continuous monitoring, are implementing the right security rules and have application security protocols.

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But broadly, Hurd is looking at the use of artificial intelligence. For 2018, he said he wants to explore how the government can use AI, especially across all the data so many agencies collect, for purposes of fraud detection and improving citizen-facing services.

“I think the best example is [the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency],” he said. “We should not have analysts doing a side-by-side of one photo on day one, and the same kind of image on day two, to determine if a car has moved half a pixel. With the advances of AI, you should be able to use computer vision to do those kinds of things.”

And it’s not that NGA isn’t getting into AI. In fact, the agency awarded four contracts earlier this year to enhance AI and automation for geospatial-intelligence analysis. According to NGA, this research will help the agency explore how humans and machines can work together to analyze all its data and better meet customer demands. The contracts include developing automated solutions and systems that improve decision making, streamline workflows and even form virtual assistants.

But many of these solutions heavily rely on the cloud. Hurd said the only way to use AI at its full potential is to have the data in a cloud that is enabled for AI and machine learning.

“We’re definitely not there yet,” he said, but that’s why data center consolidation, which is a huge part of FITARA, is so important.

In fact, in the most recent scorecard grades, some agencies still failed in that category.

“There shouldn’t be a debate, the cloud is not new technology,” Hurd said. “The cloud is emerged, and you can secure it, so why are we not moving to it?”

Once agencies do move to the cloud, they can begin to reap the benefits of AI —
and that’s what Hurd is focusing on in the first quarter of next year. He said to expect a series of hearings on the topic.