

Florida's Technology Agency Caught in Political Crossfire

Matt Williams | June 14, 2012



History is repeating itself in Florida. For the second time in seven years, the organization in charge of the state's information technology has been de-funded because of a spat between the governor and the Legislature.

The Florida Agency for Enterprise Information Technology (AEIT) has been decommissioned because it has no budget appropriation for the new fiscal year beginning in July. The action happened after Gov. Rick Scott vetoed a bill passed earlier this year that would have abolished the AEIT and made a new IT agency.

The legislation, HB 5011, would've created a new "Agency for State Technology" with duties and responsibilities that were narrower than the AEIT, according to a summary from the state's impartial analyst. The new agency would have focused on the state's ongoing consolidation into two primary data centers.

Scott vetoed the bill in April, saying the new agency's scope was too restrictive and would have stifled innovation. The governor said he looks forward to working with the legislature on a new enterprise IT plan prior to the next legislative session, slated to begin in 2013.

David Taylor, who headed the AEIT as the state's CIO, said he agrees with Scott's decision, even though it resulted in losing the AEIT for at least a year. Taylor said he

and the governor think the AEIT was headed in the right direction. "I believe some real good will come out of this for Florida. What may result is a stronger, larger and more empowered IT organization," Taylor said.

But Taylor is among the affected. With no funding for AEIT, the agency's 16-person staff has been forced to take new jobs within other Florida agencies. That includes Taylor, who became state CIO four years ago and helped grow the agency after it was created in 2007. Effective in June, Taylor took the vacant CIO position within the Florida Department of Children and Families, where he plans to help launch important modernizations of benefits and eligibility systems.

The bottom line is that, at least for now, Florida is operating without a state CIO and an agency that's in charge of IT policy and strategy.

The situation is reminiscent of [what happened in 2005](#), when the Florida State Technology Office didn't receive funding and the state CIO position was eliminated when then-Gov. Jeb Bush vetoed a bill that would've made wholesale changes to how the state managed technology. At the time, some lawmakers faulted how the state was overseeing large technology contracts and projects.

Now, seven years later, Florida is again trying to regroup. In the near term, Scott's spokesman told *Government Technology* that a new efficiency task force announced this month by Florida's new chief operating officer, David Wilkins, likely will include an examination of the state's technology and could lead to further IT consolidation. Wilkins also has retained his post as the secretary of the Department of Children and Families, so it's not a stretch to think that Taylor will be close by to lend his expertise.

In addition, Scott's spokesman said the governor is putting together a special group of former AEIT employees to work on network security, with the goal being to maintain current service levels.

But at least one of the state's large IT systems already has been impacted by the legislative maneuvering. Florida's new enterprise email system was defunded, forcing state workers' mailboxes to be migrated back into the state's old and decentralized systems. In an interview published earlier this year in *Government Technology*, [Taylor spoke glowingly](#) about the new Exchange 2010 email system hosted in a data center run by the vendor Affiliated Computer Services (ACS). Now the work is being undone, a move Taylor called disappointing.

The upheaval also has left vendors uncertain. Several executives with business ties to the state contracts told *Government Technology* that they are in a wait-and-see mode and are trying to understand the full impact of no longer having the AEIT and a state CIO.

"My hope of what will come of this is a CIO with a strong base of power," said Kevin Schmid, the Florida public-sector manager for Intel Corp. Schmid said he believes that's the consensus opinion of his colleagues in private industry.

But for that 'strong CIO' scenario to happen, Scott and the Legislature will have to get on the same page. Not everyone is a believer in the AEIT. State Rep. Denise Grimsley, the Appropriations Chair of the Florida House, sponsored HB 5011.

“It became very apparent to me that there were significant performance issues within Florida’s current structure (Agency for Enterprise Information Technology), and [I] felt that in its current state [the agency] was ill-suited to provide the statewide vision and oversight needed for certain enterprise information technology projects.

That’s why the bill gave the proposed Agency for State Technology a more focused mission, Grimsley explained.

Taylor said he remains hopeful that the absence of a state IT agency will be temporary. In the meantime, Florida likely will continue to proceed with its data center consolidation — albeit slowly. Taylor said the migration is about one-third done.

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