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MODERNIZING THE CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT AGENCIES TO  
MEET THE NEEDS OF AN EVOLVING CONGRESS

Thursday, October 21, 2021

House of Representatives,

Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress,

Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 9:01 a.m., in Room 2175, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Derek Kilmer [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Kilmer, Perlmutter, Phillips, Williams, Timmons, Davis, and Joyce.

The Chairman. Okay. The committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

So one of the most amazing things about serving in Congress is the access Members have to expertise on every issue imaginable. The range and complexity of issues that Members encounter on a daily basis can be totally overwhelming, and schedules leave little, if any, time for doing independent research. So the ability to call on subject-matter experts for nonpartisan analysis on issues before Congress and in their districts back home undoubtedly helps Members do their jobs better.

Expertise also helps Congress do its job better. This committee has done a lot of work focused on strengthening Congress's Article I capacities, and ensuring that Congress is well-staffed with expertise is an important part of that. The legislative branch's informational and analytical capabilities need to be on par with those of the executive branch if Congress is to fulfill its obligations as a co-equal branch of government.

The legislative support agencies make Congress and its Members smarter. Armed with budget scores, policy analyses, legal assessments, and accountability measures, Members are better equipped to make informed decisions on behalf of the American people.

So today's hearing is about showcasing the terrific work that GAO, CRS, and CBO are doing and highlighting the innovative steps they are taking to update their products and services. This committee recognizes the tremendous value these agencies provide to Congress, and we are looking forward to supporting their work in any way we can.

Today's hearing will also consider how Congress's support agencies can adapt to best meet the needs of an institution that is constantly evolving. Quick accessibility to

information is key for Members and staff who spend much of their days on the go. If a question comes up in the middle of a hearing, staff should be able to instantly find an answer using their phones.

Expertise that meets Members and staff where they are is also important. A junior staffer in a personal office probably has different informational needs than senior committee staffers. And while some Members want verbal briefings, others prefer dense reports. Tailoring information to the end user's needs facilitates learning and ultimately helps Members and staff better serve the American people.

The expertise that is available to Congress is truly remarkable; it is also somewhat of a mystery to many who work on the Hill. I am hoping we can also discuss how the agencies can ensure that Members and staff know about the incredible array of resources available to them.

The committee will once again make use of the committee rules we adopted earlier this year that give us the flexibility to experiment with how we structure our hearings. The goal is to encourage thoughtful discussion and the civil exchange of ideas and opinions.

So here is the wonky part. Therefore, in accordance with clause 2(j) of House rule XI, we will allow up to 30 minutes of extended questioning per witness. And, without objection, time will not be strictly segregated between the witnesses, which will allow for extended back-and-forth exchanges between members and the witnesses.

Vice Chair Timmons and I will manage the time to ensure that every member has equal opportunity to participate. Any member who wishes to speak should signal their request to me or Vice Chair Timmons.

Additionally, members who wish to claim their individual 5 minutes to question each witness pursuant to clause 2(j)(2) of rule XI will be permitted to do so following the

period of extended questioning.

I feel like I really nailed that, you guys.

All right. I would like to now invite Vice Chair Timmons to share some opening remarks.

[The statement of the chairman follows:]

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Mr. Timmons. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning. Great to be with you. Sorry for the schedule change. We appreciate you all accommodating it. And, really, I just want to say thank you so much for coming, yourselves. It means a lot.

And we are here to discuss what additional tools and resources you all need to do your jobs better. And we have been trying to fix the same problems for decades. Immigration comes to the front of mind -- debt, healthcare. We are not really getting very far, and we have to change the way we are doing things in Congress.

And so the purpose of this committee is how to make Congress more effective, efficient, and transparent for the American people. That is the tag line. But, really, it is, how do we solve these big challenges that we are facing? And, honestly, your role in how to make Congress do its job better could not be more important. The resources that you all provide really make a big difference.

And the question is, what can we do to help Members of Congress and to help your various groups, support agencies, make us better at our job? And so, really, we appreciate you taking the time. Our hope is to figure out what we can do to help you do your jobs better so Congress can do its job better.

So, again, just thank you so much for taking the time to come, yourselves. And we look forward to learning more. And be prepared; this is not a normal hearing. We will all ask questions, and we will go back and forth, and it is really more of a roundtable setting. So it should be fun, and, again, thank you for being here.

[The statement of Mr. Timmons follows:]

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The Chairman. Terrific.

We have two panels today. I am honored to welcome our first panelists who are here to share with us the efforts their agencies are taking to continue providing top-notch support to Congress.

Witnesses are reminded that your written statements will be made part of the record.

Our first witness is Gene Dodaro, the Comptroller General of the United States and the head of the Government Accountability Office. He has served in that role since December of 2010. Previously, he served as Acting Comptroller General and as the Chief Operating Officer of the GAO.

Mr. Dodaro, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENTS OF THE HONORABLE GENE DODARO, COMPTROLLER GENERAL,  
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE; MARY MAZANEC, PH.D., DIRECTOR,  
CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE; AND PHILLIP SWAGEL, PH.D., DIRECTOR,  
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE**

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE GENE DODARO**

Mr. Dodaro. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Timmons. Good to see you both this morning. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about GAO's service to the Congress.

GAO has evolved over the past century -- and, this year, we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the GAO -- to provide a wide range of services to the Congress. For example, we deploy multidisciplinary teams of subject-area and technical experts to look at hundreds of Federal programs and activities every year. Now, these audits result in tens of billions of dollars in financial benefits to the government, as well as over a thousand improvements to government operations, public safety, improvement of services to the American people.

Secondly, we have developed the capabilities, evolved over time, in order to monitor, real-time, what is happening, particularly in national emergencies. For example, on the coronavirus issues now, we have been giving monthly briefings to the Congress. Since the March 2020 CARES Act, we have been reporting bimonthly. We have issued over 100 reports to the Congress, made over 200 recommendations to improve the Federal response to the coronavirus issue as well as increase the transparency and accountability of the \$4.8 trillion that Congress has appropriated for



those funds.

We have also greatly expanded our capabilities in the science and technology area. We are doing many more reviews, technology assessments -- artificial intelligence, quantum computing, 5G. We have many underway. We have increased the short-term and medium-term products to the Congress in the technology area based upon a need that was demonstrated recently, and also to provide more technical assistance to the Congress.

We are on track to enhance our operations in the science and technology area with a plan that we were asked to provide to Congress in 2019, so we will more than double the size of that group by the end of this fiscal year. And I have asked for additional resources from the Congress. This is a top priority for me, and I believe we need to be able to provide this for the Congress as well.

We have also developed the capability to identify overlap, duplication, and fragmentation in the Federal Government. Our work there has resulted, in the last decade, in 1,200 recommendations. And Congress has acted, either fully or partially, and the administration, on over 70 percent of those, and it has already resulted in half a trillion dollars in financial benefits to the government.

Now, of course, we provide our traditional financial management operations as well. We audit the financial statements of the government. We give advice to the Congress on the fiscal trajectory issues, the debt issues, and other factors.

And then we also act as guardians of the role of the Congress to control the power of the purse. We issue legal opinions on the impoundment issues, on antideficiency issues, any appropriation law issues. We have a wide range of services.

Now, I would say, we are also well-postured in order to continue to evolve to meet the needs of the Congress as they change. You know, GAO has a unique structure.

The Comptroller General is selected from a bipartisan, bicameral congressional commission, you know, confirmed by the Senate, for a 15-year term. So we have more continuity than any other Federal agency, and it is important, then, to use that wisely to continue to enhance our services.

We have a tremendous, dedicated, talented, multidisciplinary task force with all sorts of skills. We have a strong strategic planning and strategic foresight operation. We have been ranked consistently in the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government. This year, we were ranked number one in midsize agencies across the government. We have an extensive network of experts who work with the private sector, academia, the National Academies, and other services.

So I am happy to be here. I appreciate the interest in GAO. And I would be happy to enter into a discussion, dialogue, about how we can continue to work on evolving to meet the Congress's needs.

[The statement of Mr. Dodaro follows:]

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The Chairman. Thank you.

Our next witness is Mary Mazanec. Dr. Mazanec has served as Director of the Congressional Research Service since December 2011.

Before joining CRS, Dr. Mazanec served as a Deputy Assistant Secretary and Director of the Office of Medicine, Science, and Public Health in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at the Department of Health and Human Services.

Dr. Mazanec, welcome. You are now recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MARY MAZANEC, PH.D.**

Ms. Mazanec. Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons --

Mr. Dodaro. Press it one more time. There we go.

Ms. Mazanec. Is it on?

Mr. Dodaro. Yep.

The Chairman. Now it is on.

Ms. Mazanec. Anyway, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the efforts of the Congressional Research Service to optimize its services for Congress.

In addition to addressing your questions, I will highlight some of the initiatives CRS has undertaken to ensure that we continue to provide exceptional support to a 21st-century Congress. I will also outline some of the challenges that CRS faces as it strives to keep pace with the evolving needs of Congress.

Since its establishment in 1914, CRS has diligently carried out its mandate to provide Congress with timely, objective, nonpartisan research, analysis, and information. However, the current Congress operates in a markedly different environment than that of its predecessors. In addition, Congress continues to grapple with increasingly complex public policy issues in a period of constrained resources.

Also, technological advancements provide Congress immediate access to more information sources than at any prior time in history. However, not all of these sources are authoritative and without bias. Also as a result of advances in IT, congressional offices can now instantly communicate by way of email, the internet, and other web-based applications. These innovations have created expectations on the part of

congressional users that the information, analysis, and consultative support they need will be readily available and accessible whenever and wherever they wish to retrieve it.

To this end, as Congress has evolved and in response to feedback from congressional stakeholders, the Service has undertaken a number of initiatives. And I want to give you some examples.

In order to meet the diverse needs of congressional users, in addition to our longer analytical reports, the Service has developed shorter, more concise products to provide timely information and analysis on emerging issues.

Also, CRS has diversified its product line, creating and piloting new visual and audio formats such as instructional videos, interactive graphics, and podcasts. These newer products enable Members and staff to access the Service's expertise at their convenience and in a format that they prefer.

In response to congressional interest, CRS has instituted hiring actions to bolster expertise in emerging or expanding policy areas. For example, CRS created 12 additional positions to strengthen our support on science and technology issues.

The Service continues to work with the Library's Office of the Chief Information Officer to modernize its IT infrastructure. This multiyear initiative will provide CRS staff with the best resources to create and deliver products and services to Congress.

Finally, CRS continues to collaborate with the Legislative Branch Bulk Data Task Force, the House Clerk, and the House Legislative Counsel to implement modern legislative data interchanges and develop tools and data standards that are critical to analyzing the impact of proposed legislation.

Now I would like to turn and flag three pressing challenges that the Service faces.

First, continued recruitment and retention of a dedicated, professional workforce is essential to the Service's mission and is a top priority for CRS. Given the current

market for talent, this will require resources to bolster and replenish the analytical capacity necessary to support the Congress.

Additionally, CRS recognizes that Congress represents an increasingly diverse constituency. Therefore, it is imperative that the Service continues to build and maintain a diverse workforce. As such, CRS is implementing a number of strategies to address this other top priority.

Second, preserving CRS's institutional knowledge is an important component to our ability to serve you. CRS is developing and implementing strategies to manage the knowledge that it creates, including the capture of tacit knowledge held by senior analysts, attorneys, and information professionals.

Third, our experience during the pandemic only reinforced the fact that information technology is a critical tool that the Service employs to accomplish its mission. Implementing and maintaining useful technology is costly and labor-intensive yet mandatory to support our work for you.

Finally, I want to thank you for allowing me to contribute to this discussion today, and I will be happy to respond to your questions.

[The statement of Ms. Mazanec follows:]

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The Chairman. Thank you, Dr. Mazanec.

And our final witness on this panel is Phillip Swagel. Dr. Swagel has served as the Director of the Congressional Budget Office since June of 2019.

Prior to joining CBO, he was a professor of international economics at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy. He previously served as the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Economic Policy from 2006 to 2009. Dr. Swagel has also served as chief of staff and as a senior economist at the White House Council of Economic Advisers.

Dr. Swagel, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF PHILLIP SWAGEL, PH.D.**

Mr. Swagel. Thank you. Thank you, Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and members of the select committee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the efforts of the Congressional Budget Office to enhance our transparency, our effectiveness, and efficiency.

Today, I will highlight four aspects of our work.

First, CBO is focused on responsiveness and on transparency. Beginning in fiscal year 2019, the Congress increased our budget to bolster that process, to expand staffing in high-demand areas, such as healthcare and immigration, to organize our staff to work on broader shared portfolios, and to publish more data and documentation about our methods. And we report to the Congress about our work in progress every 3 months.

We work hard to make our work accessible. We have improved access to our cost estimates, in particular, on our website, for example, by improving our search function and adding more information to the web pages for each bill. There is a link to the bill text and other information on Congress.gov from the CBO landing pages.

Okay. So that is one, on responsiveness and transparency.

Second, we are working, you know, as my colleagues here in the other agencies have said, to increase the diversity of our workforce. And attracting and retaining a diverse workforce, it helps us have the best possible staff, and our work benefits from these different perspectives and different experiences.

So, last year, in 2020, we created a diversity and inclusion working group. And the mandate of that group includes recommending ways to increase the representation of diverse staff -- of women, minorities, people with disabilities -- in our agency's



workforce and then, on the substance of what we do, to ensure that all staff can contribute successfully to our work and to our culture.

So that is number two.

Number three is, we at CBO are increasing access to data. We have in place more than three dozen data agreements for protected information, and we are working to arrange agreements that allow our analysts even greater access to data, especially remote data. We have done a lot during the pandemic to enhance our ability to access information remotely and to do it securely, as well, to guard against cyber threats.

And fourth and lastly, we continue to make organizational changes and operational changes to better serve the Congress. And part of that is that, as legislation has grown more complex, we are just doing more work and spending more time providing technical assistance during the drafting stage of legislation. You know, so it doesn't always result in a cost estimate, but our work will be generally with the committee staff while they are developing legislation.

On cost estimates, we have prepared cost estimates more often for bills that are heading for votes without being marked up for committees. And we strive to do this to meet the needs of the Congress while fulfilling our statutory requirement to prepare cost estimates for bills approved by committees and other reports specified in law about the budget and the economy.

We have reorganized our staff as well. You know, part of it is to address three priority areas that we see the Congress focusing on. One is healthcare, second is income security, and a third is the combination of climate, energy, and infrastructure. And then we have also created a new unit in our Budget Analysis Division focused on education, housing, and finance, essentially to improve our capacity to do cost estimates in those areas.

So let me finish there. In conclusion, CBO remains committed to becoming even more transparent, more effective, and more efficient, and we will continue to innovate to best support the Congress.

Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Swagel follows:]

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The Chairman. Thank you.

I now recognize myself and Vice Chair Timmons to begin a period of extended questioning of the witnesses. Any member who wishes to speak should just signal their request to either me or to Vice Chair Timmons.

So I have two threads I want to pull, and then I am eager to kick it to others.

One, I just want to give you an opportunity -- we are going to hear from a second panel of folks who have looked at your agencies from the outside and maybe have some ideas around areas we could optimize, better support your missions. I know you had a chance to look at their testimony, and I just wanted to invite -- if you have insights into anything that they are going to tell us, I want to give you an opportunity to swing at that pitch. So anybody have anything they want to say on that front?

Yeah, go ahead. And I will just go down the line.

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah. First, I appreciate the interest, always, from anybody, and ideas. And that is the way you improve your operations.

The person who will be testifying regarding GAO is, you know, complimentary of the accomplishments of the agency and is advocating for additional resources and makes a number of suggestions. I am, obviously, very supportive of the increased resources there.

There is one proposal, though, a major proposal, that is made that I am not in favor of at all. And that is creating a separate entity within GAO for science and technology policy issues.

This is how duplication and overlap start in the Federal Government. We have issued hundreds of reports on these issues over the years, and this is not a good idea. And I also don't think that -- placing a decades-old model that Congress has decided not to fund for 25 years in GAO is not my idea of modernization. And I just think it would be

a bad idea.

I think that the independent study done by the National Academy of Public Administration that concluded that Congress support GAO and CRS and, if they wanted additional -- if Congress wanted an additional resource, to create a small office in the Congress for technology absorption issues, I think that is a better approach in those areas.

And so, you know, I mean, to take, you know, as I am saying, an old model and put it in an otherwise well-functioning organization, it reminds me of the Hippocratic Oath, you know, "First, do no harm." And I think that that would harm GAO's reputation over time.

And I am happy to talk to Congress and focus on what outcomes that you want, as opposed to what kind of process, you know, that we decide, you know, and how we manage the agency. But bifurcating an agency is not a good idea.

The Chairman. Uh-huh.

Go ahead.

Ms. Mazanec. Okay. So I read with great interest --

The Chairman. You may want to move the mike closer. It may be on, but just far away.

Ms. Mazanec. Is it on?

The Chairman. That is on. Yeah.

Ms. Mazanec. Okay. Thank you.

I take feedback about CRS very seriously, and I wish we could actually get more feedback from congressional users so that we can help you better.

There are some points in her testimony that I agree with, and then there are other points that I do not concur with.

So I agree with the fact that Congress needs shorter products. We recognized

this need about 5, 6 years ago and started to create shorter products. We serve a diverse congressional user population, and they have varying needs.

I do not agree that the longer analytical reports are not being read. I have heard from Members and from congressional staff that they do read our longer analytical reports.

We are always trying to present our research and analysis in different and new formats to be digested by the congressional user in the way that they find best for them.

So that is one point.

An issue was raised about a timeliness of a product. And that was the first I heard about that. Timeliness is one of our core values. We do whatever we can to meet your deadlines.

However, we are a high-volume operation. In fiscal year 2020, we had over 75,000 targeted research requests, and we have limited staff. And so we do prioritize, starting with requests that are time-sensitive -- if they are tied to floor action, a markup, or something that is moving.

We do talk to the requester. We try to come up with an agreed-upon approach moving forward. We try to meet your timeline, like I said, with what we can deliver on your timeline. Because we know you have deadlines that you have to meet.

The other issue that was surprising to me is an issue that was raised about gender issues and gender equity. As the first woman to head up CRS since its beginning, I take that very seriously. And, in fact, last spring, we did look at hiring, salary, and promotion with respect to gender, and we did not find a consistent pattern that would suggest that there is a gender equity issue. But we are always tracking that and watching that.

Like most Federal agencies, we are challenged by the diversity issue. We want to recruit and retain a diverse workforce, and that would include women. Actually, we are

predominantly women; we are 57 percent women at this point in time. So we have a strategic initiative focused on that.

So I think those are the points that I would mention at this point, but I am happy to follow up on other ones if you have specific questions.

The Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. Swagel. Yeah, great, thank you. And, yeah, I thought Phil Joyce's testimony was excellent. And, I mean, he has written the book on CBO, so it is not surprising.

I will just mention two things from his testimony.

One, you know, the first one, I just deeply agree on, and this is the key aspect of making sure our work is nonpartisan and objective. And, you know, obviously, that is my foremost responsibility as Director. You know, fortunately, it is deeply embedded in the agency, in the DNA of the agency.

So, you know, I think that is number one. And this is where we are the opposite of Gene and opposite of GAO, right? You know, such a valuable part of the work at GAO are the recommendations, right? Here is a problem, here are suggestions on how to fix it. And, you know, we stay away from that. And, again, it is just a different -- it is a different mission.

The other aspect of Phil's testimony that I think is really interesting and, again, I agree with is the thinking about the broader issues, you know, so the benefits. And, of course, you know, at CBO, our bread and butter is the cost, you know, how much does something cost. But, of course, we know Members want to know, well, what are the benefits? And that, we strive to provide as much information as we can -- you know, first explain the costs and then provide the completeness on what are the impacts.

And, of course, the thing we need to stay away from is saying it is worth it or it is

not worth it. Because, you know, intrinsically, that is up to you, up to policymakers, and not up to us. So that is just the balance we are trying to maintain. And, again, I agree with what he put.

On broader issues, the other one that is something I have been thinking a lot about is, what more information can we provide? And, of course, there is a lot of interest in the Congress on distributional analysis. And we have been increasing our capacity to do that. You know, we have longstanding reports on distributional issues, but we are trying to do more, and not just by income but by geography, by race, by other dimensions. And the data can be a challenge, but we are working on that.

And the challenge is, there are just these limitations. You know, there is no distributional baseline. We don't know the distribution of the existing, you know, current law, so it is hard to say how the distribution changes for every single piece of legislation. But it is something we are working on.

And kind of the same thing applies to regulation, that the idea of having us analyze every regulation is kind of beyond the edge of what we do or what we are set up to do. We can do it in limited fashion. If there is legislation to undo a regulation, well, of course we would analyze that and provide the costs and the impacts of that, but it would be hard for us to do it more broadly.

The Chairman. I want to just piggyback on the point you just made, because I think -- I can't remember if it is the next or one of the next hearings we are going to have is related to evidence-based policymaking. It seems like one of the things that Congress grapples with as an institution. Members can't even agree on some of the facts and problem definition, let alone solutions. And so looking at how we elevate that issue is something that this committee is going to look at.

Mr. Swagel. Uh-huh.

The Chairman. You know, a few of you mentioned in your testimony, you know, trying to get more data analytic capabilities, access to data sets.

I just want to ask hopefully a short, directed question, because I want to get to other members.

Do you need anything further from Congress to be able to drive that kind of 21st-century data analytic capabilities within your institutions, or do you have it covered? Do you need more access to data sets? Do you need more access to data scientists? Do you need more access to -- what?

Ms. Mazanec. All of the above.

So we do deal with data sets, and we use it both for our research but we also use it to track usage and utilization of our products and services so that we can better position ourselves to support the Congress.

I think not only resourcing the technology that is needed to mine the trends -- we do have a balanced scorecard initiative at CRS that is in pilot phase -- but also personnel, data personnel, data scientists, would also be helpful.

So I agree with that. The more information we can get out of the data that we sit on, or data sets that other people have that we can obtain -- and that would go to our research needs, which are expensive. Some of the research materials that we need to purchase are expensive. So that would be helpful.

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah. As part of our effort to enhance our capabilities, we have set up an innovation lab in our science and technology function, and this would take a lot of data sets.

I have hired our first chief data scientist at GAO from the private sector, a well-qualified individual. We are bringing the data scientists. It is on our plan for this fiscal year to hire six or seven more data scientists. So we are in the midst of doing that,



and I have asked for additional resources from the Congress to expand it.

Now, this data lab, so far, I mean, we are working on identity verification issues as part of a joint project with OMB and the Treasury Department to really figure out, you know, with all the fraud that occurs, to try to use data matching better to do identity verification, how to audit blockchain technologies. We have issued a first foundational document on how to audit artificial intelligence algorithms and have a framework for that. So we are off to a very good start with this activity.

Now, we have asked for some access modernization, and we have given Congress draft legislation to give us access to people and electronic data more. We have pretty good access to information throughout the Federal Government. We have unique access that, really, a lot of other people don't have. And so it is very important.

But we are augmenting that with additional data collection. I mean, as you know, the amount of data that is available exponentially grows every year, and your ability to absorb it is very important.

So we have started on this journey. We have a good plan; we are off to a good start. We could use some additional resources and help modernizing our access legislation.

The Chairman. Great.

Mr. Swagel. Access to data is something I think about a lot. We get access in two ways. One is from executive-branch agencies, and then two is from the statistical agencies.

You know, generally, the executive-branch agencies are pretty helpful. Just as an example that we are working on right now is on the toxic exposure legislation. There are bills in both the House and the Senate on this. And we have gotten a lot of information from the VA, the Veterans Administration, and it is incredibly helpful. It is

complex data we are asking for, you know, sort of very detailed financial and health information. It has taken them a while, but they have basically come through. So that is the kind of success; it has just taken a while. But they have been helpful.

The stats agencies -- we get a lot of information from the Census and the IRS. And, of course, the challenge is the data security issue, right? We have to be good stewards of that and the security. And we are, and we work carefully with those too. And as the Congress wants more from us, that is something I would have to start thinking about, is, you know, if we are asked to do more distributional work, well, we might need more access to data as a result.

And we are not there yet, so I am not asking for more. And, again, I would want to make sure that any data we get are just, sort of, as limited as possible. So distinguish us from, you know, say, JCT, our sister agency, that has much broader access to tax information. And, you know, that is their business, and I just want to stay limited. But it is something I am thinking about.

Ms. Mazanec. Can I --

The Chairman. Go ahead. Yeah, sure.

Ms. Mazanec. Can I add --

The Chairman. Sure.

Ms. Mazanec. -- something? After listening to my colleagues, I would like to make another point.

We also rely on data from executive-branch agencies to inform our work for you. It is critical that we have access to the data. Occasionally, executive-branch agencies are reluctant to share data with us. They ask us to submit a formal FOIA request, or they ask us why we need the data, who is it for, or they try to put restrictions on use of the data, where they don't want us to share it with third parties. All of that would make it

more difficult for us to support you.

My authority to get information from the executive-branch agencies is in the organic statute. It is derived from the committees, and the committees have to authorize or I have to act as an agent of the committee. I do not have subpoena power. So anything to strengthen the authority that I have or the ability for me to get the data would be appreciated.

The Chairman. Okay.

Go ahead.

Mr. Timmons. Thank you.

Well, first, you said you liked feedback at CRS. Let me give you my feedback. I have had an incredible time working with some of your cybersecurity experts. Probably spent, I don't know, 6 or 8 hours with them. And they are extremely knowledgeable and generous with their time. So I have had a great experience.

Along those lines, what percent of Congressmembers or staff do you -- offices -- do you think reaches out to CRS on an annual or a 2-year basis?

Ms. Mazanec. So, every year, virtually 100 percent of Members' offices and committees use CRS in some manner. I think the real challenge is making congressional users aware of the full spectrum of support that we offer to them and that it is not just our written products.

And so we have intensified our outreach, especially at the beginning of a Congress or the beginning of a session, to try to make them aware of everything that we can do to support their work for the American people.

Mr. Timmons. I am surprised at that answer, but I think that is fantastic. Thank you.

Each of your agencies mentioned retention and recruitment as an issue.

Obviously, during the pandemic, we saw the capabilities of videoteleconferencing. And do you anticipate offering telework positions?

Obviously, you are somewhat limited with your resources, but I have to tell you, the dollar goes a lot further in South Carolina than it does here in Washington.

So, you know, is that something you all are looking at to try to facilitate better staffing opportunities?

Mr. Swagel. I can answer first.

Yes, it is. And, you know, we anticipate, as we continue to come back into the office, you know, more fully, that we will have some positions that staff have the option to be fully remote. It is going to be, you know, a limited number, and we are going to look at it carefully and start carefully, but I do anticipate that.

And then it could be for spans of work. It could be someone is going to be able to work for a couple weeks remotely, you know, maybe, if not full-time. So we do see doing that.

Ms. Mazanec. So we were in a hybrid situation pre-pandemic. We had a telework option. Within a 24-hour period at the start of the pandemic, we transitioned to a virtual environment. And I think we have done fairly well.

Telework is governed by a side agreement to our CBA. We are in the middle of negotiations. We are also within the Library, and the Library has a framework for telework.

We certainly have learned a great deal about the experience during a pandemic. I suspect that, post-pandemic, we will have, again, a hybrid work environment with increased flexibilities.

We will not -- we will have telework within the capital region, but, at this point, we are not planning to offer telework at a distance.

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah. First, you know, we don't have a problem with recruitment and retention. I mean, our retention rate is 94 percent. Past few years, it has gone down. I mean, we are only, like, you know, 5 percent attrition, we are expecting.

We have been able to attract and retain a very diverse workforce in GAO. We have 58 percent women, 34 percent minorities. We have been ranked number one in the government for several years on commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues.

We allowed telework pre-pandemic in a very generous way. People could work up to, you know, 66 out of 80 hours in a 2-week pay period remotely and telework. I expect that to continue. That is why we didn't have much problem moving to telework.

Now, what we have learned, though, in the pandemic, as you are saying, Congressman Timmons, is that, when we opened up recruitment, particularly for interns, which is our main pipeline for hiring, we were able to get a more diverse group of interns by not having them be in our field offices or in GAO headquarters. So we are moving to have our internship program be open for more remote learning as well.

And I have a group studying what the operating posture would look like when we come out of the pandemic, and then we will have to negotiate with the union. But these are very important issues, so I am open to considering these things. But, you know -- so we will work through them.

But on the intern thing, I think it is a great idea. And I have talked to a number of other Members who have the same views that you do.

Mr. Timmons. Great.

One other quick question. We made recommendations last Congress regarding the schedule to essentially be here more and travel less.

I imagine it wouldn't affect your two agencies if Congress was here 50 percent

more -- for example, in 2019, we were here 65 full working days and 66 travel days. You can make some changes to the schedule that would allow us to be here 90 days, maybe 110 full days a year. I don't think it would affect you all.

But there was talk that maybe you all have issues with the congressional calendar and capacity. Could you speak to that? Or is that --

Mr. Swagel. Sure, sure. I can speak.

You know, we work however the Congress works. You know, the challenges with the calendar and the schedule come, you know, just in terms of the budget process, right? The way the budget process is working is not exactly the way it was set down in the 1975 act. We will put it that way.

So that poses a challenge. I mean, even things like, when is our next budget update? Well, knowing if the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and whatever the next, you know, reconciliation bill, if those are enacted or not enacted, you know, that would affect the macro-economy, that would affect, you know, sort of, throughout the budget. And so we are sort of on hold with our next budget update, waiting. So that is the kind of scheduling challenge we have.

Mr. Timmons. So it is not so much, if Congress were here more, it would create a capacity issue. It is more whether we do our job in a timely manner, and that is more the issue.

Mr. Swagel. Right. I mean, I think -- and we support the Congress however the Congress works --

Mr. Timmons. Okay.

Mr. Swagel. -- but those are the challenges. And, when Congress is away, you know, we are pretty engaged with the staff, so, you know, that works fine.

Mr. Timmons. Do you all have any issues if Congress was here 50 percent more

full working days?

Mr. Dodaro. No.

Mr. Timmons. No capacity issues? Okay.

Mr. Dodaro. No.

Ms. Mazanec. No.

Mr. Dodaro. The main thing I would comment on is, if there is anything that could be done to make sure that the appropriations are done on time.

You know, one thing I never aspired to be in the government is an expert managing under continuing resolutions. And that has an effect on your ability to plan and manage. You know, I mean, it would affect people in the private sector or affect anybody.

And so, you know, we have been able to adapt and deal with things, but, to me, that is the most important timing issue that I would encourage, you know, Congress to consider.

Mr. Timmons. Sure.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The Chairman. Ms. Williams is on virtually.

Ms. Williams. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to apologize to all of our witnesses and the fellow committee members this morning for being virtual and not in person. But, going back to Mr. Timmons and talking about scheduling, Congress needs a scheduler, because I have three committee meetings that are running concurrently this morning and trying to make it work.

So I apologize when I have to drop off, but I also have a full House Financial Services Committee meeting and a T&I subcommittee hearing on aviation, which -- my district has the world's busiest airport, and this is something that I also must chime in on.

So, again, Congress needs a scheduler.

But I am so glad to hear about the diverse hires in the GAO office and all that you have done to make sure that your offices are truly representative of our country and the diversity that makes up so many of our districts, because we know that our lived experiences that we bring to the table in our work makes our country so much better and so much more rich.

And so I am just wondering of some ideas and strategies that we could share with CRS. And I am thrilled to hear that you have such a high number of women working at CRS, but would love to hear more around direct strategies to increase the diversity in the office.

Ms. Mazanec. I suspect that is my question. So --

Ms. Williams. And maybe the office of GAO can give some recommendations since they have done such a great job at diverse hires.

Ms. Mazanec. So, right now, our staff is roughly 75 percent White and then 25 percent non-White. And, over the last -- at least the last 6 years, diversity has been a top priority -- another top priority for us.

I stood up a diversity and inclusion workgroup to make recommendations about how we can increase the percentage or the number of applicants to our jobs that come from diverse backgrounds.

And we also have expanded our outreach efforts so that we are reaching out to entities that represent underrepresented populations. We participated in 42 job fairs last year, many of which were held by institutions, colleges, schools that have a diverse student population.

We are also trying to guarantee that our hiring panels have diversity represented.

And so, with all of that, my hope is that we will start to see more diverse



applicants in the pool. Anecdotally, the last two hiring panels that I served on, I was very happy to see such a diverse applicant pool.

And then, once we are able to hire individuals, we want to also be able to retain them. So we want our workplace to be inclusive. To that end, we have, in the past year, provided four trainings to staff on topics such as allyship and microaggressions, and we also added a fifth training session for managers on conflict resolution, alternate dispute resolution.

So I would love to hear if there are other things that we could put in place in CRS to address the challenge of diversity.

Ms. Williams. Thank you.

Anyone want to give any tips on how you have been successful at increasing the diversity in your respective agencies?

Mr. Dodaro. Well, I have made it a key priority of my tenure. And I have a special assistant for diversity, equity, and inclusion that reports directly to me. We have focused on trying to drive it down through the agency. My job is to set the right policies and tone but to have it operate at each level.

And I have allowed people to develop communities of practice to -- for example, our African-American senior executives decided to meet on their own. I meet with them on a regular basis. They bring ideas, they bring new energy, they bring things that we have been able to implement. I have had that same experience with other groups.

I have set up a Diversity Advisory Council at GAO. We have questions in our annual employee survey where we ask people their views on our policies, whether their supervisor is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. And we consistently have rated over 80 percent positive response rates on that.

We have training programs. We have a diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic

plan with performance measures and goals that we check.

So, you know, we employ all, sort of, good management best practices to this, but it requires a sustained commitment, and you have to set the right tone and follow through.

Ms. Williams. Thank you.

The Chairman. Mr. Joyce, and then I have Mr. Phillips, and then we will move on to the next panel. If we can have short questions and short answers. I want to keep us on track.

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. Thank you, Chairman Kilmer.

You know, one of the things I have learned since I got here is everybody comes with great ideas on how to get things done. And, as an appropriator, Chairman Kilmer and myself, we see a lot of these programs, and then you try to fund them, and you realize when you are doing that that there is a duplication, triplication sometimes, across different agencies regarding that.

And I was just wondering how, you know, GAO, if there is a way that you could help us sort of streamline these programs and how Members can tell and make these programs achieve their outcomes but become more cost-effective in doing so.

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah. Actually, I mean, we spend a tremendous amount of time doing that.

You know, one of the things that we have been doing for the last 11 years is an annual report on overlap, duplication, and fragmentation in the Federal Government. We have made 1,200 recommendations. About 70 percent have been fully or partially implemented. That has saved over half a trillion dollars in financial benefits. There are tens of billions of dollars additionally that could be achieved by following our other recommendations in this area.

But this is an endemic problem, not only among agencies but within some individual agencies is a problem. And so we have all kind of recommendations on this. We would be happy to brief your staff or work with you on it. But that is high on our agenda.

And a lot of our work makes things more efficient -- our recommendations makes operation more efficient, even if there is an overlap or duplication or fragmentation in the agency. But it is important, also, that Congress not build in new fragmentation, overlap, and duplication in some of the new initiatives. Because what we find, the way this happens, as you say, everybody has a great idea, and sometimes what is in place isn't working effectively, so, rather than try to make it work effectively, we create a new program --

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. Right.

Mr. Dodaro. -- here, you know? And this is true of -- you know, we found, like, dozens of education programs outside the Education Department. And, you know, housing programs; science, technology, engineering, and math studies -- I mean, there is just a proliferation of these activities.

And, you know, on the legitimate side, there are a number of problems that require multiple agencies to be involved. And, there, you want to have good collaboration and coordination. So you can't have everything isolated; you know, you need multidisciplinary approaches. But you don't need unnecessary duplication.

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. Thank you very much. And I will take you up on that next appropriation season.

Mr. Dodaro. Sure.

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Dodaro. Happy to help, whether you are in town or not.

The Chairman. All right.

Mr. Phillips?

Mr. Phillips. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you all. I appreciate the value you add to both the Congress and the country.

But would any of you say that Congress takes advantage of your respective services, educational and otherwise, in a way that you would like to see? Do any of you feel that we really get the most out of your respective basket of services? Any of you?

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah. Go ahead, Phil.

Mr. Phillips. Yeah.

Mr. Swagel. Okay, sure.

I mean, I feel like we do. It varies by offices. You know, most of our work is for the chairs --

Mr. Phillips. Of course.

Mr. Swagel. -- Members, and leadership, and they do.

In some sense, the challenge for us is that we are working so much for them -- you know, say, in healthcare, you know, the different committees in the two chambers on healthcare absorb the, you know, time so much that it is hard for us to do other things.

Even when we can't do a cost estimate for, you know, a Member who is not a chair or ranker, we provide technical assistance. And that varies. In some sense, it is probably on me and on CBO to make sure that offices know that they can come to us even if they are not the committee chair, and we are probably not going to be able to do a cost estimate, but we can do other things. And that is something I can do.

Mr. Phillips. Yeah.

And I will ask you two the same question.

And do you track engagements by -- do you know how many offices have -- and can you give us a sense of how many offices --

Mr. Swagel. That is a good question. We do track.

Mr. Phillips. Okay.

Mr. Swagel. I don't have it, you know, off the top of my head.

It varies by issue. On healthcare, there is so much across the board. On an issue like opioids, or opioid use disorder, we hear from many Members. In a sense, that is part of what we do, is try to understand the interest in Members and build up our technical capacity.

I would just mention one last thing, which is surprise billing --

Mr. Phillips. Yeah.

Mr. Swagel. -- which we realized was an issue that was building, and so we built the technical capacity. And it was partly from our seeing what was going on in the world but also partly from hearing from Members that they wanted to know about it. And so we were ready.

Mr. Phillips. I appreciate it.

Either of you two, the same question. Do you think Congress fully utilizes your services, and do you track engagement, and what does that look like?

Ms. Mazanec. So, as I said, virtually 100 percent of offices and committees use CRS in some manner. Not everyone uses our full breadth of products and services, and part of that is because they are not aware of it. So we have to be more aggressive on outreach.

We do tailor our support to the needs of the individual Member or congressional staffer. And since there are very diverse needs, that is part of the challenge. Some people want, you know, just the high points on an issue. Other people want us to do a

more deeper dive, an in-depth analysis.

Mr. Phillips. Okay.

Ms. Mazanec. And, obviously, any feedback we get from our congressional users about what we could do to better support them, we try to accommodate them. We try to create new products that are useful to them.

Mr. Phillips. I appreciate it.

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah. You know, we regularly provide services to 90 percent of the standing committees of the Congress and the members of those committees. We try to outreach to as many individual Member offices as we can with brown-bags.

We also provide training, sort of a GAO 101 training, for new congressional staff. We provide training for congressional staff on appropriations law and GAO's role in appropriations law.

But I have been trying for a decade to get more GAO involvement in the orientation to new Members. And if you could help me there. It is not for a lack of trying, all right? I have --

Mr. Phillips. I was hoping we might get there.

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah.

Mr. Phillips. And that is exactly my point.

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah.

Mr. Phillips. You know, this is my second term, and, as I come to recognize the breadth of services that you can provide, not to mention the education for new Members, in particular when we are bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, is a tremendous opportunity.

And I just encourage our chairs to consider that as you move forward. I would have loved a little bit more deep dive during our orientation. When Democrats and

Republicans digest information and education together, I am convinced we process it in a much more objective fashion.

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah.

Mr. Phillips. And I would strongly encourage our body to consider how to incorporate some deep dives into the issues facing the country during our orientation program.

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah. And I would be more than happy to do that. I have been trying.

Mr. Phillips. Well, I am going to champion it.

Mr. Dodaro. I have been trying. And I think it does have the effect that you say.

And, plus, our policy is we try to encourage as much bipartisan requests for our work as possible, and a lot of our work comes in requests from committees or --

Mr. Phillips. Sure.

Mr. Dodaro. -- mandates from Congress, which, by definition, are bipartisan.

So those things are very important. And I think it is needed now more than ever because of the increased turnover in the Congress, not only among Members, but staff are moving around quite a bit. You know, this is my 49th year at GAO --

Mr. Phillips. Wow.

Mr. Dodaro. -- so I have seen, you know -- and it is different now than it historically has been, and so that is even more important.

Mr. Phillips. Well, this is my 52nd year on Earth.

But thank you, very sincerely. And, especially in an era where there seem to be two sets of facts, increasingly, even within this institution, the more that we can bring people together under one set of facts, I strongly encourage.

And thank you all.

Mr. Dodaro. I agree. Sure.

The Chairman. Great.

Mr. Davis?

Mr. Davis. Can you hear me? Thank you.

Sorry I am running behind. I actually wanted to get here -- great to see you all here, but -- Dr. Mazanec, thank you for what you do at CRS.

I am a little disappointed that we can't do an oversight hearing in House Administration to talk about some of the issues that I think that -- well, I don't set the agenda there, so I am hoping that Chairperson Lofgren will and that we can talk a little more in depth.

I am going to submit some questions for the record, because I know my colleagues want to get to the next panel, and I do too.

[The information follows:]

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Mr. Davis. But we have some issues with jurisdictional issues. You know, many of my colleagues have brought up some complaints with some of the products that are coming in, be it timeliness, be it a possible bias, some other issues, the quality of product, that I would really like to sit down with you personally and talk about and be able to get some of these questions answered -- and accountability too. Whereas, we can then achieve the same goals that I think all of us around this table want to see CRS and every staff member in each office be able to achieve.

So I won't take any more time, unless you wanted to make a comment?

Ms. Mazanec. Well, I will be happy to follow up with you so that we can have an in-depth discussion on some of the issues you have just mentioned.

Mr. Davis. Well, I had a really good set of questions, but because I couldn't get here on time, Chair Kilmer is doing the right thing and not allowing me to sit and talk for 20 minutes.

So thank you for that.

And you are welcome, to everybody else.

But, Doctor, let's do that. Again, even if we could do a one-on-one at some point, I would really, truly appreciate it, as we move into this Congress and the next.

Thank you.

Ms. Mazanec. Okay.

Mr. Davis. I yield back.

The Chairman. I do want to actually just -- and we really have to get to the next panel, so if I can ask for just really quick responses.

One of the points that Mr. Davis mentioned, I think, is a thread that we could pull on. And some of you in your testimony -- and I think, Dr. Mazanec, you mentioned that, you know, you worked with Gallup and you, you know, tried to survey how are we doing,

basically.

I guess one of the things I am interested in is: Do your agencies get or have the opportunity for really real-time feedback on -- you know, so I got this report. You know, I mean, there are a lot of things that I consume where I can go on Yelp or I can, you know, provide immediate feedback. You know, when I go through the airport, I clear. Before I am done, I have an email saying, "How was your experience?"

Do your agencies do something like that where, when I get a CRS report or I get a GAO report, there is an immediate opportunity as an end user to say this was helpful, this wasn't helpful, here is how it could have been more helpful? Do you already do that?

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah, we --

The Chairman. GAO does?

Mr. Dodaro. Yeah, we do at GAO. We don't get a high response rate back from the Congress, but we ask the question. You know, some people say, "Well, look, we are happy. If we are not happy, we will let you know" --

The Chairman. Yeah.

Mr. Dodaro. -- you know? So I assume that. But we do ask --

The Chairman. Yeah.

Mr. Dodaro. -- was it timely? Did it meet your needs?

And then, you know, I try to meet with chairs and ranking members of all the committees and get direct feedback, too, that way. That is not the only way we do it, but we do it on a --

The Chairman. Sure.

Mr. Dodaro. -- product-by-product basis as well.

Ms. Mazanec. So we do try to solicit feedback. Congressional attendees at our seminars are asked to fill out a form afterwards to provide us with feedback. We get a

lot of feedback. It is not officially solicited. We can explore a more regular solicitation.

Part of the challenge we have is the response rate. Even with the Gallup surveys that we have done every 2 years, we get 10 percent of the people that we send the survey to to actually respond.

I would love to get more feedback from Members. I do try to meet with Members, but you have busy schedules. I can't always get a meeting with you. I am happy to meet with your chief of staff or your LD to get feedback. Obviously, if you have an issue with a report that we have issued or a response to our request, I want to hear about it.

The Chairman. I know we have to get to the next panel, but --

Mr. Swagel. Yeah.

The Chairman. -- if you have just a quick swing?

Mr. Swagel. I will be super-fast.

We do it in two ways. One is directly. You know, if somebody doesn't like a cost estimate or has objections with it, they find us quickly. So that is one. We do surveys. We track things on our website, you know, where people are coming from. So we do a little bit.

We also work with the Budget Committees. And, you know, both sides, all four corners of the Budget Committees are extremely helpful for us, you know, sort of, flagging people who are upset or building, you know, moving toward being upset with us.

The Chairman. Terrific.

I want to thank all three of our distinguished panel members for their testimony and for joining us to share their insights. Thank you.

And, with that, let me invite up our second panel. And, while they are coming up, I am going to read their bios, just so we can stay on schedule.

We are now joined by three experts who are here to share their ideas for modernizing the products and services the legislative support agencies provide to an evolving Congress.

Witnesses are reminded that their written statements will be made part of the record.

Our first witness is Zach Graves. Mr. Graves is the head of policy at Lincoln Network. His research and advocacy focus on the intersection of technology and governance issues, including work to strengthen science and technology expertise and capacity in Congress.

He is a member of the GAO's Polaris Council, an advisory body of leading science and technology experts. In 2018-2019, he was a technology and democracy fellow at the Harvard Ash Center.

Mr. Graves, if you are ready -- are you ready?

Mr. Graves. All set.

The Chairman. All right. Cool. We are just rolling, because I went a little over time with that last panel.

But you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENTS OF ZACH GRAVES, HEAD OF PUBLIC POLICY, LINCOLN NETWORK; WENDY GINSBERG, PH.D., STAFF DIRECTOR, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM; AND PHILIP G. JOYCE, PH.D., PROFESSOR AND SENIOR ASSOCIATE DEAN, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY**

**STATEMENT OF ZACH GRAVES**

Mr. Graves. All right. Thank you.

Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and members of the committee, thank you for having me here to testify.

My name is Zach Graves. I am head of policy at the Lincoln Network. We are a right-of-center organization working to advance innovation, governance, and national security and work to bridge the gap between Silicon Valley and D.C.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office. Over its history, GAO has provided essential oversight, insight, and foresight to Congress, supporting its legislative and oversight functions.

This work has a direct and tangible benefit to taxpayers. Over the past 20 years, GAO's work has resulted in more than \$1.1 trillion in savings. GAO's return on investment has consistently exceeded over \$100 for each dollar of its budget.

Despite its impressive record, however, GAO's tools and resources have not kept up with demand. Even as Federal spending and the national debt have massively increased, GAO's staffing level is 37 percent smaller than it was three decades ago.

Over its 100-year history, GAO's mission, authorities, workforce, and strategic focus have evolved significantly. The agency was established as the General Accounting

Office in the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921, moving this function out of the Treasury. Coming out of the New Deal and heading into World War II, growing Federal programs placed significant new demands on GAO, and it expanded to nearly 15,000 staff.

The next few decades saw GAO move away from its green-eyeshade era of accounting-focused work towards program evaluation and a more professionalized workforce. By the late 1960s, GAO was recruiting more staff trained in non-accounting fields, including science and technology in particular.

With the backdrop of an unpopular war in Vietnam and the aftermath of Watergate, this period also saw Congress reassert itself. This included major reforms in the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970; increased staffing resources; the creation of the Congressional Budget Office, which testified earlier; and the Office of Technology Assessment, or OTA. These reforms helped rebalance Congress's information asymmetry with the executive branch and allowed it to reassert itself.

Coming out of the Cold War and heading into the 1990s, the pendulum swung back away from Article I. Congress downsized GAO and enacted across-the-board cuts to the legislative branch, particularly in the 104th Congress. This included reductions for committees and support agencies and the elimination of OTA. The GAO emerged out of this period that was perhaps more lean and responsive but also significantly more risk-averse.

Science and technology in GAO: Since OTA was defunded, there have been numerous efforts to reestablish its function. This led to the creation of a technology assessment pilot in GAO in fiscal year 2002. While it had some initial success and was praised by outside reviewers, it did languish in relative obscurity for nearly two decades.

In January 2019, GAO elevated this program to become the STAA, or Science,

Technology Assessment, and Analytics, team. With the support of the current Comptroller General, STAA has doubled its staff, refined its TA methodology, produced numerous spotlights, technology assessments, and other kinds of analysis. And its innovation lab has worked to develop innovative new approaches to program evaluation and oversight.

A congressionally directed report by the National Academy of Public Administration endorsed STAA but echoed longstanding concerns about the suitability of GAO's culture and bureaucracy for S&T work and particularly for technology assessments, highlighting that there are some major challenges remaining to its governance.

In my written testimony, I list actionable recommendations to improve STAA's governance, including adopting some of OTA's structural features, like an advisory version of its Governing Technology Assessment Board, mirroring the relationship that CRS has with the Library of Congress, and having an appropriations line item and congressional budget justification.

Importantly, these are ultimately still under the Comptroller General's authority and not an independent office. Providing additional bureaucratic separation is also something that can be done as a spectrum and not an either/or.

Nor is this an original idea. In 2004 and 2005, Rush Holt and Amo Houghton advanced a bipartisan proposal called the CSTA that would create an OTA-like office in GAO, and it went through several rounds of vetting by then-Comptroller General David Walker as well as S&T experts. And there are several iterations of this draft with commentary that I am happy to provide.

I also list a number of low-hanging-fruit improvements to enhance STAA, including giving it an office in the Capitol, a separate website and internet portal, and to have it self-initiate more reports under the CG's authority rather than to react to issues on

request, which can take a year or more to complete and often are out of touch and not appropriately, you know, doing horizon-scanning and the important, sort of, foresight work that is key to science and technology issues.

I also offer recommendations to strengthen GAO writ large, including estimating potential savings from unimplemented recommendations, which was something that was discussed at the earlier panel; addressing internal IT challenges; increasing funding for the agency; and adjusting its funding model to be a share of Federal discretionary spending so it is not constrained by the particular political environment of the legislative branch's 302(b) sub-allocation. I also propose a series of reauthorization hearings to address the full range of GAO reforms, many of which I was not able to get to in my testimony.

Throughout its history, GAO has shown it can adapt and restructure to meet new challenges. It has gone through several iterations in the past. With new tools such as machine learning, cloud-based data analytics, and others, GAO has a monumental opportunity to modernize for the next century and advance a vision to transform Congress's ability to understand and oversee Federal programs in real-time.

Yet I fear the low salience of these issues, insufficient resourcing, and institutional bias towards the status quo risks depriving GAO of significant opportunities to stay relevant and maximize future taxpayer savings. As we move into the future, we must consider that risk-aversion in this domain is, itself, a massive risk.

I look forward to the important work of this committee in helping address these challenges, and I thank you for the opportunity to testify.

[The statement of Mr. Graves follows:]

\*\*\*\*\* COMMITTEE INSERT \*\*\*\*\*



The Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Graves.

And I encourage folks to look at the written testimony too.

I appreciated you had a number of recommendations you thought this committee should pursue. And I know we weren't able to get to it in your verbal remarks, but I really appreciate it.

Our next witness is Dr. Wendy Ginsberg. Dr. Ginsberg is the staff director on the Government Operations Subcommittee of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform. Prior to joining the committee, she was a senior program manager at the Partnership for Public Service, and, from 2007 to 2017, she served as an analyst at the Congressional Research Service.

Members are reminded that Dr. Ginsberg's testimony today represents her own personal thoughts and not those of this subcommittee or the chairman.

Neither her testimony nor her responses to any questions will touch on any specific matter the Oversight Committee has investigated, the Oversight Committee's investigative practices, nor any specific matter that she worked on as an analyst at CRS. She will be limited to providing observations and recommendations to improve the services of CRS and the other agencies that support congressional staff.

Dr. Ginsberg, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF WENDY GINSBERG, PH.D.**

Ms. Ginsberg. Thank you for that, and thanks for that preamble. Thank you, Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and other members of the select committee, for inviting me here to testify on ways to improve Congress's service agencies.

Thank you to each of the witnesses from our first panel.

Honestly, we couldn't perform our constitutional duties without them and the hard work of the people in their agencies.

I have been asked to testify today because of my unique perspective on the Congressional Research Service. I proudly served as a nonpartisan analyst for nearly a decade. Today, I am a user of CRS's services, as the staff director of the Committee on Oversight and Reform's Subcommittee on Government Operations.

I proudly serve Chairman Gerald E. Connolly and this Nation by conducting oversight of the appropriations of the entirety of our Federal Government as well as State and local governments. With a jurisdiction so vast, I rely on CRS, the Government Accountability Office, and the Congressional Budget Office to help me perform the almost insurmountable oversight needed to ensure our government runs smoothly and effectively.

My testimony today represents my own personal thoughts and, like Chairman Kilmer said, not the thoughts of the subcommittee, the chairman, the full committee, or the chairwoman.

I will make three main points about how the Congressional Research Service could take straightforward steps to modernize and dramatically improve its services to Congress. These comments are laid out in greater detail in my written testimony.

One, CRS must revamp its product line and how its products are distributed to Members, congressional staff, and the public. Two, CRS must transform its culture to one that is focused on customer service. And, three, CRS must refocus its efforts on accomplishing its core mission.

Thirty-, 40-, or even 75-page reports will not be read by most congressional staff. I agree, there are a couple who will read them all, but most of them won't read them. These reports are daunting and, frankly, can confuse staff more than help them. CRS must generate products that combine legal and policy analysis and not make us go to several sites to figure out the policies that we need to know about a single subject.

And did you know that CRS has podcasts? I know that Dr. Mazanec said that on the earlier panel, but you can't find them on the website, and there has only been one made this year -- one -- in February.

Most of the videos on the website are more than an hour long -- too long to be of use to Congress and staff. The CRS search engine puts outdated reports at the top of its results page. And I can't even try to search for a product on the site from my iPhone. As a former CRS analyst, it pains me that the great CRS research done by my former colleagues is not more easily located by decisionmakers.

Why is CRS not generating newsletters targeted to each committee and subcommittee with products that are likely of relevance to them?

Why is CRS not asking for Member and staff feedback on their products and services? There is not a "feedback" button on the website.

Moreover, CRS could allow its staff to serve details in personal offices and on committees, providing CRS experts the opportunity to understand which products work for us and how to more effectively provide authoritative information in a timely fashion.

My second point: CRS must evolve its culture to one focused on customer

service.

CRS's mission is to serve Congress, yet when we call CRS analysts and attorneys, we are sometimes told that our research question is the wrong one or that it can't be answered. I have been told that my request is not a priority for CRS. I have had to contact analysts and attorneys several times to track down outstanding requests. On another request, I was told that my request was, quote, "too 'in the weeds' for consideration." CRS is designed for these weeds.

There are a few simple ways CRS leadership could take critical steps toward better customer service.

First, CRS analysts and attorneys should simply take the initiative to place an electronic calendar hold on staff calendars for consultation appointments. Even that is so helpful to me.

Next, CRS should consider incorporating customer-service metrics into performance reviews. It shouldn't be the whole review; we shouldn't be reviewed by a panel of the many. But it should be a component of how you are assessed as a CRS analyst.

Third, CRS must do better in helping its staff adapt to new online platforms used by the House and Senate. CRS needs to get technology right.

Finally, analysts and attorneys must connect Members and staff directly with the expert or experts they need and not send us on a goose chase to collect and find the right people to help us answer our questions.

These actions would help defeat a culture of "this is not my issue" that currently permeates CRS.

My final point: CRS must refocus its efforts on accomplishing its core mission. CRS, at times, has allowed its staff to stray from its mission to serve Congress or allowed

that mission to atrophy.

CRS should be anticipating the needs of Congress. Yet, in many cases, reports on pertinent legislative and oversight issues are released days after the relevant hearing. CRS must observe and follow the rhythms of congressional needs and prioritize their research and analysis accordingly.

Additionally, CRS must encourage its staff to engage in the academic and policy debates in public forums at academic conferences.

CRS attorneys and analysts either prevented from or uninterested in evolving cannot provide Members and staff the highest quality of research, analysis, and information that is required by the agency's mission.

I end my testimony by reiterating my high regard for all of the support agencies, particularly CRS. I want them to be the most effective they can be to help Congress serve this Nation. Without them, we repeat errors, we miss nuances, we would simply be too overwhelmed to function. We must evolve and improve together, leveraging technologies and refocusing resources to pack the most punch for this Nation.

I look forward to the conversation today. Thank you for inviting me to testify.

[The statement of Ms. Ginsberg follows:]

\*\*\*\*\* COMMITTEE INSERT \*\*\*\*\*

The Chairman. Thank you, Dr. Ginsberg.

And our final witness on this panel is Philip Joyce. Dr. Joyce is senior associate dean and professor of public policy at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy. He is the author of "The Congressional Budget Office: Honest Numbers, Power, and Policymaking."

You actually did write the book on CBO.

Dr. Joyce is a former editor of Public Budgeting and Finance, is a past president of the American Association of Budget and Program Analysis, and is past chair of the American Society for Public Administration's Center on Accountability and Performance.

Dr. Joyce has over a decade of public-sector work experience, including 5 years as a principal analyst with the Congressional Budget Office.

Dr. Joyce, thanks for being with us. You are now recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF PHILIP G. JOYCE, PH.D.**

Mr. Joyce. Thank you very much.

Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to share my views on the role of the Congressional Budget Office in supporting the Congress.

I want to express at the outset my admiration for what this committee is trying to accomplish. There is no more important issue, in my view, facing our political system than ensuring that the Congress remains a strong body capable of serving as an independent voice in our political system. Weak, understaffed, or outdated support agencies invariably would contribute to a weaker Congress and, therefore, transfer power to the executive branch.

I am here to talk specifically about CBO, although I am an admirer of all the congressional support agencies. And I would note, regarding CBO, that the Congress has a lot to be proud of in having established and supported this agency.

There have, in fact, been many countries who have looked at CBO's successes -- Australia, Canada, Italy, Korea, and Mexico I think are the best examples -- and established similar independent fiscal agencies. In that sense, congressional organization has served as a model for the modernization of legislative institutions in other countries.

I have submitted my statement for the record, but I want to highlight three points, and then, if there are others, we can discuss them in Q&A.

And I make these points mainly because I think it is important that this committee focus on how we can educate Members of Congress on why CBO exists, on how to use



CBO, and what the limitations are of CBO analyses.

First, it is important to note that history shows that CBO has done exactly what it was intended to do, which is to empower the Congress relative to the President and to serve as a check on the executive branch.

When I was researching my book on CBO -- and I want to say, Mr. Chairman, that it is the best book ever written on CBO because it is the only book ever written on CBO. It is also the worst book ever written on CBO.

The Chairman. Oh, sorry.

Mr. Joyce. There were multiple executive-branch officials who told me that they used the fact that there would be CBO analyses to prevent more dishonesty in Presidential proposals.

Second, the most influential effects of having CBO have come through its cost estimates of legislation, as Director Swagel pointed out. To that end, I think any evaluation of its success needs to look at how those estimates are prepared, their accuracy, their timeliness, their consistency, and their transparency.

I want to highlight a couple of these.

CBO has paid a lot of attention over its history to making sure that it is using a consistent set of assumptions in costing out proposals so that one proposal is not disadvantaged relative to another simply because different assumptions are used.

And while CBO, I think, has always tried to be relatively transparent in how it presents information to the Congress about its assumptions, it has responded, I think, to congressional interest in more transparency in a number of ways that Director Swagel pointed to in his testimony.

I have been particularly impressed with the attention to data visualization in recent years, which have made CBO products much more accessible and understandable.

You see much less now of, you know, having to read the 40- or 50-page dense CBO report, and it gets summarized, I think, much better in a way that can be actually accessed by more Members of Congress.

I would point out one more thing on timeliness, which is, it is very important, I think, if the Congress is going to make effective use of CBO, for it to avoid considering legislation on the floor that does not have a CBO cost estimate. And I noticed in CBO's budget justification for last year that 25 percent of its estimates were -- or 25 percent of the bills that were considered on the floor did not have a CBO cost estimate. And I think that should be avoided.

Third, there have been criticisms that CBO analyses take an overly narrow view by focusing largely on Federal budgetary costs and not on the benefits of legislation. This, of course, is what the Congressional Budget Act tells them to do, and I do think this criticism ignores much of the broader policy analysis work that CBO does.

But, to the extent that anybody thinks that CBO should systematically focus on cost and benefits in its estimates of legislation, I think that would be problematic, and I think that would compromise its nonpartisan reputation, because you don't have to move very far from that in order to suggest that CBO is essentially saying the Congress "should do this" and the Congress "should not do that."

In conclusion, far from the Congress needing to reform CBO in any kind of major way in pursuit of modernization, CBO -- and I think the same could be said for GAO and CRS as well -- is instead one of the most important factors that contributes to the modernization of Congress.

In short, other countries want what the U.S. has. And, frankly, they are often flabbergasted to discover that the Congress supports a large and influential nonpartisan agency in the midst of such a hyperpartisan political environment.

It is important for the Congress to recognize that a credible, nonpartisan CBO is vital to the ability of the Congress to set its own fiscal policy and to challenge the President -- and I mean any President -- on policy. If CBO ever became viewed as one more source of partisan noise, it would be of limited use to the Congress or the Nation.

The capacity for nonpartisan analysis from all the support agencies, not just CBO, should be protected. Once lost, it would not easily be regained.

Thank you, and I look forward to the conversation.

[The statement of Mr. Joyce follows:]

\*\*\*\*\* COMMITTEE INSERT \*\*\*\*\*

The Chairman. Thank you, Dr. Joyce. And congratulations for having the top-selling book on Amazon related to the CBO.

Mr. Joyce. Thank you. Yeah.

The Chairman. I now recognize myself and Vice Chair Timmons to begin a period of extended questioning of the witnesses. Any member who wishes to speak should just signal their request to either me or to Vice Chair Timmons.

I have one broad question and one specific question.

My broad question is, you know, these support agencies were all founded in the early to mid- 20th century. They are largely all still operating under the same authorizations, even as they have had to adapt to changing circumstances.

Are there any authorities that they currently don't have that would help them better fulfill the mandate to support Congress? Anything we ought to be looking at in terms of additional authorities that ought to be granted to these agencies?

Mr. Joyce. I am happy to start.

So I do think Director Swagel sort of talked about this a little bit in his testimony, but I think, you know, data are available in much different ways now than they were when this agency was created.

And I think, you know, in particular, you know, the ability to access data electronically -- my understanding is that CBO, prior to the pandemic, actually periodically had to, sort of, drive out to Suitland in order to get its, you know, data from the Census, and it got temporary authority to actually access the data electronically.

I think it would be helpful to look into, you know, continuing that kind of thing. So I think it is very important for them to be able, you know, to access the data that they need and to do it in a timely fashion and to not have to go through a lot of red tape in order to do that.

Ms. Ginsberg. I would say, for CRS, I would agree with Dr. Mazanec that, at times, we kind of just used our charm and persuasion techniques to get information out of the agencies that we were hoping to get information from to help tell the story to Members of Congress and their staff.

So it could be a consideration to think about some language that would more clearly state that CRS should be considered Congress pursuant to FOIA when asking for information.

I don't know that you want to create something that is an adversarial relationship. There should be MOUs or particular ways to, again, use just charm and conversation to get things done, but it is something worth talking about.

Mr. Graves. Yeah. I mean, I think there are a couple different important points here, one just with respect to history. And I don't get into this in my testimony in detail.

The GAO's authorities have changed at several points over its history, sometimes growing, sometimes being more constrained. I think it would be worthwhile doing a deeper dive into some of that, which is part of why I recommended a series of, kind of, reauthorization hearings around the agency to really go deep on some of these issues, like their challenges getting data from executive agencies or the need to potentially put more teeth on recommendations that they make that are unimplemented.

I also note that there are authorities that exist that are just not being used. There was some discussion of using IPA authority to bring in outside science and technology experts for STAA at several different points. As far as I know, I don't believe they have started utilizing that yet. So part of that is just, sort of, their internal culture and its willingness to, sort of, use what tools it has.

The Chairman. The other thing I wanted to ask about, we had testimony earlier this year regarding how State legislatures do business and how committees and State

legislatures do business.

I came out of a State legislature; I know Vice Chair Timmons did as well. We had some of these capabilities, sort of, tied to committees in a State legislature, where there was nonpartisan staff related to oversight, kind of like GAO does, and related to research and even bill-writing.

Do you see value in this committee looking at trying to cede some of these capabilities within congressional committees? Or is the current approach, where these are kind of independent agencies that kind of service those committees, is that -- are we doing it right, or should we be thinking about a different model?

Mr. Joyce. I think it is important for the support agencies to have some connection and for there to be an oversight responsibility that committees have for making sure that the information that is provided continues to be sort of useful and timely.

I think if that is done effectively, I don't think that it would be necessary to, sort of, you know, nest nonpartisan analysis specifically within the committees. I think, for CBO in particular, I think the Budget Committees have actually been quite active in making sure, you know, that CBO is responsive.

Now, CBO has maybe a benefit in the sense that the statute actually sort of lays out -- you know, there is kind of a pecking order for committees that they work with. And those committees are, therefore, responsible for making sure that the information that is being provided is most useful.

You know, I think an example of what you are talking about actually would be the Joint Committee on Taxation. The Joint Committee on Taxation has actually what is, you know, by all accounts, a nonpartisan staff but works for the Finance and the Ways and Means Committees. And I think, based on everything I know, that that works pretty

well. But I don't know that I would move a lot further with it.

Ms. Ginsberg. I would say that there have been nonpartisan staff who have worked with committees in the past that weren't necessarily affiliated with GAO or CRS or any of the service agencies.

But I think a more effective way to make this happen is to just really ramp up details and encourage detailees to go in and out. That way, you have the separate wall of nonpartisan research, but you have somebody with the knowledge and experience of what it is like to be on the inside so they know how to -- they have been the customer; they know what they need to get served.

And CRS just doesn't do that. I know, when I was there, I fought to go on a detail, and it just couldn't happen. And it was --

The Chairman. Now you are a full-time detail.

Ms. Ginsberg. And I was like, "Yes, it will happen." So, yeah. And now I am here. So that is my whole life story.

Mr. Graves. Yeah. I mean, I would agree that -- I mean, I think the loss of institutional knowledge, you know, as the political winds change on committees, is a major challenge. Committees are broadly -- you know, they have less absorptive capacity and, you know, less, sort of, staff capacity than they once did. And so, you know, increasing detailees, particularly from within the legislative branch, I think, is a really good way to do that.

I think GAO does a fantastic job at that. And particularly when it comes to science and technology issues, where Members of Congress and their staff typically don't come from those technical backgrounds, you know, having that informal, trusted, consultative relationship is a tremendous value, at least as valuable as producing the, sort of, long reports themselves.

The Chairman. Thank you.

Go ahead, Vice Chair Timmons.

Mr. Timmons. Thank you.

Dr. Ginsberg, thank you for your testimony. It is very helpful to get another perspective. I have had a good experience, but I have only used them on a very limited basis, and this has been very helpful.

In addition to -- I mean, I hear where you are coming from. Thirty, 40, 70 pages, that is long. Not a lot of people are going to read them. I mean, could we just -- a lot of those have executive summaries, though.

I mean, could we -- we still need the longer product to dive deep. But I do agree that maybe, if it is over a certain number of pages, there should be a 3-pager or a 2-pager, something like that. That seems like a reasonable request.

Ms. Ginsberg. I wholeheartedly agree with you. There are people who read the really long reports, but there are not a lot of them on the Hill, and they are going to be on the committees and the -- yeah, they are usually going to be on the committees, with a deeper dive.

CRS is getting better at creating suites of products. And, frankly, the fact that there are, sort of -- at the beginning of each report, there is, like, an overview of the report. That is pretty new. That actually happened when I was at CRS. So probably sometime around 2013, 2014 was when they started doing the executive summaries. Before that, they just didn't do it.

I think a lot of what we see at CRS, frankly, is because you get promoted based on the length and depth of your work. So there is an internal incentive to create longer products so that you go through the promotion process, where, I think, for the benefit of most staffers on the Hill, the shorter products would be a more effective way to feed us



the information.

And that is not to say -- I don't want to equate shorter with not as knowledgeable. I think, in fact, shorter can be more knowledgeable and harder to write. I don't think it is any simpler. I think it is much more difficult to write in a pithy way.

Mr. Timmons. And I have actually never used their search engine. I always use Google and just type "CRS" at the beginning of whatever I want. But I do agree that we could modernize it a little bit and maybe update it.

Ms. Ginsberg. We do that inside of CRS too, but don't tell anyone.

Mr. Timmons. Mr. Graves, two of your recommendations: Fully fund GAO -- do you know the difference between their current funding and what fully funded would be?

Mr. Graves. Well, there are a couple of versions of that. One would be just meeting their current budget request, which I think we are pretty close to it in both the House and -- I think the Senate bill that just came out is slightly lower.

But I would say, you know, we should think of this in terms of its ability to match the growth of Federal bureaucracy. So, if we think about, like, how big of a share of discretionary spending were they in the 1990s versus how big the administrative bureaucracy is now, it is, you know, dramatically weaker than it was, relatively.

So I would consider a much more significant increase in GAO resourcing. And I think we would see increased taxpayer benefits that match that in a very significant way.

Mr. Timmons. I have always been a huge proponent of fully funding Congress and all of its support agencies, because we spend trillions and trillions of dollars, and we need to figure out a better way of doing our job. Obviously, we are talking about budget appropriations, and -- yeah, we can't underfund the most important part of the Federal Government, in my opinion.

Last thing. Dr. Joyce, I just bought your book, so you sold one.

The Chairman. I am going to take that as a question not in need of an answer. I think that is -- you know, just say "thank you," I guess. But we are really killing it on him.

Mr. Joyce. When I get my royalty report, I will know that you were the one.

The Chairman. You were the one. We are killing it on Amazon sales in this committee.

Mr. Joyce?

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. Thank you, Chairman Kilmer.

Thank you all for being here today.

In sort of an abbreviated form, if you wouldn't mind, what would be your top two recommendations that you would think that would help to -- we could push forward to strengthen or modernize these support agencies?

Whoever wants to take it first.

Mr. Graves. Yeah, I think, you know, my first one is probably a little bit of a difficult one, which would be taking GAO resourcing outside of the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee funding, which has a peculiar set of internal political incentives that constrain its ability to grow at the rate of the Federal Government, which means our oversight capacity is constrained in its ability to grow to match the rest of the Federal Government.

We have worked together to develop a bipartisan proposal on this that I mentioned in my testimony that would, you know, make it as a, sort of, share of other discretionary spending overall.

And I think this, plus giving an initial bump to their resourcing, would be my top issue, particularly considering that they return over \$100 in value for each dollar of their budget for taxpayers, and I think there are a lot of savings that are still on the table that

they could help deliver.

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. Great.

Ms. Ginsberg. I think my number one is really easy. Like, a complete revamping of the CRS website where you can see and understand the products more effectively and know what they have and can get it very quickly. I think that the content that they do make is incredible content. I just wish we could find it.

And then the second thing I would say is really reinforcing a customer-service focus from everyone at that agency so that they are getting our feedback regularly, there is a place for us to give that feedback.

But a component of that customer-service focus is really hiring a staff that is diverse and to have a component of inclusion in that so that they can reflect the people that they are serving more effectively and be more customer-centric.

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. Do you think that the --

Ms. Ginsberg. Yeah?

Mr. Joyce. If I can?

Ms. Ginsberg. There is a followup.

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. -- that, you know, perhaps they should be advising Congress on what reports should be mandated?

Ms. Ginsberg. They should be advising Congress, or Congress should be advising them? Wait --

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. They advise us. Like, you know, they say they only have so much bandwidth. So, if there are agencies that need a report, which reports are truly necessary?

Ms. Ginsberg. I think that if there is a resource issue, they should be making that clear to the appropriators that there is a resourcing issue there.

But in terms of what Congress's needs are, it should be definitely Congress telling CRS what to prioritize. We should be telling them what to prioritize, and they should be anticipating the needs of Congress.

They have a much longer history of what has happened in Congress. They should be able to see the cycles as they are coming their way. That is part of the glory of what it means to be from CRS, is to have this long-term view to be able to anticipate and remember that these things have happened and what they have looked like and how the context is different now.

So the argument that they don't have the bandwidth there, I understand a lot of it, but a lot of it is just failing to appropriately prioritize and think through the needs of Congress.

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. Got it. Thank you.

Ms. Ginsberg. Yeah.

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. The fine Dr. Joyce.

Mr. Joyce. Yes, thank you, Mr. Joyce.

So the first is just expanding on something I mentioned earlier, which was access to data and access to information.

The thing that I did not mention earlier is, you know, the CBO statute basically says that the executive branch needs to respond if somebody from CBO calls and is looking for information from the executive branch, but it doesn't say who in the executive branch needs to respond.

And I think there are a number of occasions where a CBO analyst will try to call an agency and they will get the, sort of, congressional affairs office. And they don't want to talk to the congressional affairs office; they want to talk to the people who actually understand the programs.

And so getting down to that level -- and whether that requires some kind of a statutory change or something else, but, you know, I think -- and it is uneven. You know, some agencies are very happy to have the CBO analyst, you know, talk to somebody at the level of the program, but others, it is more difficult.

I think the second is, you know, continued attention to how information is accessed. You know, I teach a bunch of 18- to 23-year-olds, and they access the entire world through their phones. So, you know, if you can't access the products of these agencies on your phone in a way, you know, where it is easily accessible and you are able to find the information you need, you know, very quickly, then we are losing a large percentage of the population.

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. As someone who went to law school back in the days when you actually had to Shepardize cases by yourself in the law library, I appreciate that.

Mr. Joyce. Right.

Mr. Joyce of Ohio. Thank you.

The Chairman. Mr. Davis?

Mr. Davis. Dr. Joyce, are you related to Mr. Joyce?

Mr. Joyce. Not that I know of.

Mr. Davis. Interesting. Interesting.

Mr. Joyce. But he is from Ohio and I am from northwestern Pennsylvania, so we are not that far away from each other.

Mr. Davis. Oh. Are you related to our other colleague Dr. Joyce?

Mr. Joyce. Not that I know.

Mr. Davis. Dr. Joyce, Dr. Joyce.

Mr. Joyce. Maybe back in Ireland at some point, you know, in the distant past.

Mr. Davis. You know, this has been very interesting. I missed the last panel,

but to hear the comments from each of you after, you know, hearing from those who run these departments, it is interesting. Because I think you all bring up very valid points. And we all have the same goal, which is to make the House work better.

I was very interested in a comment you made, Dr. Ginsberg. You mentioned -- and let me make sure I heard it correctly. You mentioned that people at CRS get promoted for the length of what they write?

Ms. Ginsberg. I would say that, when I worked there, there was a definite incentive to write the piece de resistance of your subject matter and that the depth and length were a part of that calculus.

There is a whole package that you put together for a promotion, but showing that you have a deep knowledge is a component of that. And one way to demonstrate you have a deep knowledge is to write a really long report.

Mr. Davis. Really.

Ms. Ginsberg. Uh-huh.

Mr. Davis. Which is actually the antithesis of what we probably want in a congressional office, to want to get to the point.

Look, I was a 16-year staffer. I looked at CRS reports as gospel. You know, they put it out, and this is exactly what -- we thought it was one of the most well-researched pieces, articles, that we could get to be able to respond to our constituents.

As you can tell from my brief question that I am going to follow up with Dr. Mazanec about, I don't sense that is the case as much anymore from my staff on House Administration and my team, and that is frustrating.

What can we do to change the culture? If promotions depend upon longer reports, which is not conducive in today's day and age with social media and what have you, they are not putting out as many reports and fulfilling Congress's needs if they are

worried about their own promotion and putting a booklet together that, I don't know about you, but, I mean, Joyce probably isn't going to read. I would read it, but, you know --

Ms. Ginsberg. I definitely think there can be a disconnect, in many cases, between what works within the agency and what serves the Congress.

I think there need to be conversations with the union inside of CRS about what we can do to make sure that we are all sprinting toward a mission that is the service of Congress, which is the mission, and how do we get there, and how do we make sure you are getting measured on the right metrics, that your performance is achieving that particular mission.

And those are hard conversations. I just think we should be having them and not ignoring them.

Mr. Davis. So I really enjoyed your testimony, but give me the biggest surprise you have had, moving from CRS. And were you customer-facing there at CRS?

Ms. Ginsberg. Yeah, I was one of the analysts who answered a lot of questions, particularly on Freedom of Information Act, Federal advisory committees. All the stuff nobody knows anything about, that was my portfolio.

Mr. Davis. Oh.

Ms. Ginsberg. Yeah.

Mr. Davis. Very appropriate nowadays. Very much so.

What was your biggest surprise, coming over here? I mean, you are a staff director. So what was your surprise of how you then viewed CRS once you left?

Ms. Ginsberg. I would say my biggest surprise was that -- in CRS, a lot of what you do is very insular work. You are almost like an academic, right? You are adjacent to an academic, and it is very solo. Whereas, on the Hill, everything is collaborative.

Every email I send has, I think, maybe too many people on it, but a lot of people on it, so that we can all sort of be moving in the same direction together. And that is just not the culture at CRS. It is much more of a, you do it solo and prove who you are, more academic-facing.

And I don't expect CRS to become E&Y. I don't think that is right either. But there has to be a balance that is struck where you are somewhere in between an academic institution and an institution that has this amazing pedestal helping Congress gets its work done. And I don't think it is hitting there yet. I think it is leaning toward academia, and it needs to be a bit more of a forward-facing, customer-service-focused entity.

Mr. Davis. Do you think that is the personnel they have there that is the problem? Do you think we need more people with experience like yours to be over there to try and relay and be that bridge between Congress and the congressional staffs and the insular CRS staff you just mentioned?

Ms. Ginsberg. I think everyone should be a waitress at some point in their life. That is just me, personally, but --

Mr. Davis. I asked, "Do you want fries with that?" at my first job, and it was the best job that prepared me for this place.

Ms. Ginsberg. Agree.

I think that CRS could -- again, it is an academic arena, and a lot of people come out of academia from there. And academia is not known for its customer service. So, if you are in a leadership position, you might want to help get some training for people on what it means to be customer-focused and customer-centric. And I never got that once when I was at CRS.

Mr. Davis. Wow.



Last question/comment. My questions I had for Dr. Mazanec actually centered around the lack of cooperation between CRS and the Library of Congress's inspector general. I had a quick conversation with her out in the hall. She said that that may not be the case, in her opinion.

But you are on the Oversight Committee. We on House Administration are not exercising our proper oversight responsibility over CRS and over the Library of Congress in this case. I would love to work with your committee, your teams, to be able to get some of these questions answered.

So take that back to my colleagues on Oversight. Because I think it would be very beneficial for us to maybe utilize some of our oversight responsibilities to get some of these suggestions directly to CRS.

So, with that, I yield back, Mr. Chair.

The Chairman. Thank you.

And I know you are here only in your capacity as having worked at CRS, so --

Ms. Ginsberg. Thank you, Chairman.

The Chairman. You got it.

With that, let me -- anybody else have any questions that we didn't get to?

I want to thank Mr. Perlmutter. I know that both he and Ms. Williams had three hearings at the same time. But the ability to join us virtually, I am very grateful for that.

I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony today and thank our committee members for their participation.

Thank you to our staff for pulling together another terrific hearing with some very informative witnesses.

So, without objection, all members will have 5 legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which will be

forwarded to the witnesses for their response.

I ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as they are able.

[The information follows:]

\*\*\*\*\* COMMITTEE INSERT \*\*\*\*\*

The Chairman. Without objection, all members will have 5 legislative days within which to submit extraneous materials to the chair for inclusion in the record.

[The information follows:]

\*\*\*\*\* COMMITTEE INSERT \*\*\*\*\*

[The statement of Ms. Lofgren follows:]

\*\*\*\*\* COMMITTEE INSERT \*\*\*\*\*

**Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress Committee Hearing:  
Modernizing the Congressional Support Agencies to Meet the Needs of an Evolving Congress**

**Remarks for the Record for Chairperson Lofgren**

**October 21, 2021**

I would like to begin by thanking the distinguished panels of witnesses for all their efforts in support of the Congress. I think I speak for all my colleagues when I say that it would be exceedingly difficult – if not impossible – for us to perform our duties without the support of the Congressional Research Service (CRS), Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and Government Accountability Office (GAO).

As Chairperson of the Committee on House Administration, I spend a lot of time focused on CRS. I'd like to commend the many CRS analysts, attorneys and other specialists who have continued to provide nonpartisan, comprehensive and authoritative research and analysis throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Their work has been invaluable to Members and staff as we've worked to provide much needed assistance to the individuals, communities and businesses suffering from pandemic's public health and economic impacts.

CRS, however, is not without persistent challenges that we would like to see addressed. Some of these challenges include:

- Continued lack of diversity within the Service, particularly at senior levels;
- High attrition rates, particularly in the American Law Division;
- Low morale among employees – particularly employees of color; and

- A perception among rank-and-file employees of inflexibility on the part of management with respect to certain CRS policies, including those governing telework.

For these reasons and others, the Committee on House Administration – on a bipartisan basis – has spent a significant amount of time conducting oversight of CRS. For example, during the last Congress, the Committee on House Administration held what I am proud to say was the first hearing dedicated solely to CRS oversight since 1948.

The Committee followed up the hearing with bipartisan oversight meetings and bipartisan focus groups with congressional staff to gauge satisfaction with CRS services and performance. And during the entirety of the 117th Congress, the Committee on House Administration has held bipartisan monthly CRS oversight meetings to discuss these and other ongoing challenges.

As the Modernization Committee and CRS consider ways to modernize CRS, I'd like to emphasize two key points.

- First, there has not been nearly enough progress on increasing diversity within CRS, particularly at more senior levels. As we have discussed at length here at the Modernization Committee, increasing diversity and inclusion will improve the way Congress works on behalf of the American people.
- Second, CRS should consider ways to improve recruitment and retention of its experts. Increasing diversity within CRS will certainly aid in this effort, but I'd also encourage CRS to think about other ways to attract and retain talent.

For example, I know there is a strong desire among many CRS employees for a less stringent telework policy. Over the past year and a half, we've all learned how productive employees can be while working remotely. And while there are certainly occasions when CRS experts need to be physically here on Capitol Hill, I encourage the Service to consider whether providing some additional opportunities for telework would help improve morale and attract and retain talent.

Again, I'd like to thank each of you for your service to the American people, and the distinguished Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee for organizing this hearing.

The Chairman. While I am giving thanks, I should also give thanks, I think, to the Ed

and Labor Committee, who is hosting us. So thank you to them as well.

And, with that, this hearing is adjourned.

Thanks, everybody.

[Whereupon, at 10:52 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

\*\*\*\*\* COMMITTEE INSERT \*\*\*\*\*

**Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress Hearing  
“Modernizing the Congressional Support Agencies to Meet the Needs of an Evolving  
Congress”**

**October 21, 2021 9:00 am**

**Rep. Williams (GA) Questions for the Record**

All that we do here in Congress is to serve our constituents, and the agencies represented and being discussed here today are critical in this mission. Congressional support agencies help congressional offices accurately assess how policy impacts their districts. These agencies also help constituents know what is going on in Congress.

Dr. Mazanec, this Committee has previously recommended that CRS produce nonpartisan fact sheets for pertinent topics of the day that offices could distribute to constituents. I think this is a great way to ensure constituents understand the bills and topics that Congress is considering.

1. Where is CRS in terms of implementing this recommendation and what are you doing to make members and staff aware of this important product?

Dr. Swagel, I want constituents to be able to find and understand the information CBO releases so they have the tools to form their own opinions on a bill. Your testimony mentioned that CBO is making its work more accessible.

2. What steps could CBO take to not only make its analysis more digestible for our constituents, but also to make our constituents more aware that your work exists for their informative benefit?

Dr. Ginsberg, thank you for your testimony and sharing your experience as a CRS analyst. In your testimony, you mentioned that allowing CRS staff to serve details in personal offices and on committees could help CRS better understand the needs of the offices it serves.

3. What would a detail program look like for CRS? What hurdles do you anticipate in creating this kind of program, and how can CRS overcome them?

### **Response from Dr. Wendy Ginsburg**

#### Question:

Dr. Ginsberg, thank you for your testimony and sharing your experience as a CRS analyst. In your testimony, you mentioned that allowing CRS staff to serve details in personal offices and on committees could help CRS better understand the needs of the offices it serves.

3. What would a detail program look like for CRS? What hurdles do you anticipate in creating this kind of program, and how can CRS overcome them?

#### Answer:

Most federal agencies, including Congressional Research Service's sister agencies – the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), administer detailee programs, where individuals can broaden their knowledge and skill sets by performing time-limited alternative job assignments. As a first step, CRS could glean insights from these sibling agencies to learn best practices for designing and implementing a detailee program. At bare minimum, CRS could design a program that allows qualifying employees to apply for opportunities to detail to committees of Congress for six-month and one-year terms. The assignments should reflect the analyst's or attorney's area of expertise. The program should have focused goals of

1. providing direct expertise and assistance to Congress;
2. contributing to the growth, development, and effectiveness of CRS employees;
3. deepening CRS employees' insights on the needs of staffers, Members, and Congress; and
4. strengthening the Hill's understanding of CRS's products and services.

CRS officials would face certain hurdles, but nothing insurmountable. For example, CRS officials would have to think through the guiderails for a detailee program. They would need to develop qualifying standards and requirements for those employees interested in detailing to the Hill. And CRS may want to work with GAO and CBO to better understand how its analysts engage political contexts – to clarify whether there could or should be some activities scoped as outside of what could be assigned to CRS employees who are serving a detail. CRS attorneys and analysts would have to be assigned to majority and minority offices equitably – so both parties are provided insight and assistance fairly. Hours on the Hill are different from the mostly 9-to-5 hours of CRS employees, so CRS should be clear



about what would be expected of those who detail in terms of availability and work hours. Also vital to this program would be the creation of a post-detail information exchange session where the detailee would tell CRS officials how to improve CRS products and operations to more effectively serve Congress.

Another hurdle to consider would be how to fill in for individuals who are on detail – to ensure that Congress receives the continuity of operations it needs from CRS – regardless of who is on a detail. Finally, Congress may choose to consider amending current law to allow for CRS analysts to detail to personal offices. Currently, the Committee on House Administration’s Members’ Congressional Handbook states that, pursuant to law, “detailees may not be assigned to a Member office.” In contrast the Director of the Congressional Budget Office, pursuant to 2 U.S.C. §611, may “establish a program providing opportunities for employees of the Office to engage in details or other temporary assignments in other agencies, study, or uncompensated work experience which will contribute to the employees’ development and effectiveness” as part of CBO’s employee development program. Congress may choose to provide the CRS Director similar statutory language.

### **Response from Dr. Phillip Swagel**

*On October 21, 2021, the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress convened a hearing at which Phillip L. Swagel, the Congressional Budget Office’s Director, testified about the agency’s efforts to enhance its transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency.<sup>1</sup> After the hearing, Congresswoman Nikema Williams submitted a question for the record. This document provides CBO’s answer. It is available at [www.cbo.gov/publication/57556](http://www.cbo.gov/publication/57556).*

Congresswoman Williams’s Question  
About How CBO Makes Its Work  
Accessible and Visible

Question. Dr. Swagel, I want constituents to be able to find and understand the information CBO releases so they have the tools to form their own opinions on a bill. Your testimony mentioned that CBO is making its work more accessible. What steps could CBO take to not only make its analysis more digestible for our constituents, but also to make our constituents more aware that your work exists for their informative benefit?

Answer. Making its work accessible is a top priority for CBO. For example, the agency recently began publishing most of its reports in a mobile-friendly HTML format. CBO creates

interactive tools to help readers better understand its analyses, as well as slide decks and visual summaries that present reports' main points briefly and clearly. Another recent development is a new format for reports that emphasizes data visualization. CBO has also improved readers' access to cost estimates and will continue to do so. New, predictable URLs help readers locate the estimates more quickly on CBO's website; new filters allow readers to search for estimates by the 10-year total effects of legislation on direct spending, revenues, and deficits; each estimate's web page now includes a link to the associated bill's text and legislative information at Congress.gov; and the estimates themselves are presented in a way that makes it easier to find pertinent information. In the coming months, CBO plans to update the main web page for cost estimates, making them even easier to find and making related materials, such as frequently asked questions about cost estimates, more prominent. And CBO will provide additional information to help people understand its cost estimates—for example, characterizing the uncertainty that surrounds them.

CBO aims to build on its current efforts to increase the visibility of its work. The agency releases publicly all of its formal cost estimates and analytic reports. It delivers its work to interested Members of Congress and their staffs. Soon after delivery to those key parties, CBO posts the work on its website. In addition, an email service, Twitter announcements, and RSS feeds notify subscribers when the agency publishes work. Also, CBO has enhanced its profile on LinkedIn by regularly highlighting its recent work.

Further enhancing CBO's visibility, staff members will continue to communicate daily with people outside the agency to explain findings and methods, respond to questions, and obtain feedback. CBO's Director will meet regularly with Members of Congress to do the same. Staff members will continue to give presentations on Capitol Hill—some in collaboration with the Congressional Research Service—on the agency's budget and economic projections and on other topics. Those presentations allow CBO to explain its work and answer questions. Staff members will also give presentations about CBO's findings and about work in progress in other venues to offer explanations and gather feedback.

1. See testimony of Phillip L. Swagel, Director, Congressional Budget Office, before the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, *CBO's Efforts to Enhance Its Transparency, Effectiveness, and Efficiency* (October 21, 2021), [www.cbo.gov/publication/57329](http://www.cbo.gov/publication/57329).

### **Response from Dr. Mary Mazanec**

**HEARING SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS  
“MODERNIZING THE CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT AGENCIES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF AN  
EVOLVING CONGRESS”**

**OCTOBER 21, 2021**

**REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAMS (GA) QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD FOR THE  
CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE**

Dr. Mazanec, this Committee has previously recommended that CRS produce nonpartisan fact sheets for pertinent topics of the day that offices could distribute to constituents. I think this is a great way to ensure constituents understand the bills and topics that Congress is considering.

1. Where is CRS in terms of implementing this recommendation and what are you doing to make members and staff aware of this important product?

CRS Response: CRS prioritizes responsiveness as well as timeliness. Accordingly, CRS produces Fact Sheets, which are very short reports that include minimal narrative and provide data or other factual information, often including a visual format. Additionally, CRS has increased the production of short form products available on CRS.gov. These include Insights, which are short products intended to provide information and analysis on issues of congressional interest; Legal Sidebars, which are short products produced by the American Law Division that provide legal analysis and information on issues of congressional interest; and the In Focus product, which is an executive-level briefing product on issues of active and ongoing interest to Congress. The In Focus is limited to two pages in length, and is especially useful for Members as it summarizes the essential points of an issue during a briefing. It also reinforces CRS’s policy expertise and client service. Additionally, we have added a new feature to our long form reports: an extractable one-page summary. This executive summary of the product contains the insights and contents of the report in a very abbreviated form, which conveys to the reader the main points of the product and assists in evaluating whether the longer product would be useful to read. All of these products are published contemporaneously on CRS.gov and on the public-facing [crsreports.congress.gov](https://crsreports.congress.gov).

CRS makes Members of Congress and staff aware of these and other products through routine and targeted outreach efforts, subject-matter focused newsletters, and client distribution email lists. CRS highlights products on the CRS.gov homepage on a rotating carousel (updated weekly) and in a hot topics section, and through programming on related topics. Members of Congress and staff may follow the CRS Twitter account (@CRS4Congress); subscribe to notifications of new products in particular issue areas using MyCRS on CRS.gov; and review new products by issue area on CRS.gov or chronologically under “Recent Products” on CRS.gov.