



U.S. House of Representatives

CAO

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Statement of the Honorable Catherine L. Szpindor Before the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress

The Honorable Catherine L. Szpindor
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Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and Members of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the progress that the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) has made in implementing recommendations made by the Select Committee. I would also like to thank the Select Committee for the opportunity granted to the CAO to play an active role in the modernization of the U.S. House of Representatives.

The CAO has made significant progress on many of the recommendations set forth by the Select Committee. Today, I'd like to specifically highlight the work done by the talented staff who make up the CAO on recommendations related to the House Human Resources Hub, the Transition Aides Program, the Task Force on a Diverse and Talented House Workforce, the CAO Coach program, Member leadership training, the expansion of video and technology tool offerings across the House, accessibility of House websites for those with disabilities, digital signatures, and the House Digital Service team.

HOUSE HUMAN RESOURCES HUB

On August 9, 2021, the CAO officially launched the House Human Resources Hub (HR Hub), a one-stop-shop of human resource best practices. This first-of-its-kind site, originally launched with more than 30 hiring support resources, now contains over 90 resources, tools, and other references for employees who are responsible for hiring, developing, and retaining Hill staff.

Content within the HR Hub is organized into three categories: **Hiring**, **Developing**, and **Retaining**. **Hiring** content includes resources for recruiting and selecting new staff, setting and communicating salary and benefits information, onboarding new hires, and guidance for setting up an office. **Developing** content includes performance management resources to support supervisors and managers through formal staff evaluation, and professional growth resources to foster learning, career development, and professional development. **Retaining** content includes resources for engaging and

supporting staff to foster a positive work environment, and resources for managing staff transitions to support the exit process and the retention of institutional knowledge.

We understand each Member, Committee, and Leadership office at the House is different. HR Hub resources are designed to be used as best practices, tips, and tools. They provide a solid foundation that offices are encouraged to utilize, adapt, and customize to meet their unique needs.

As of December 31, 2021, the House HR Hub had a total of 782 *unique* visitors and 5,092 total page visits. Resources from the Hub have been downloaded a total of 1,412 times, by 280 unique users. The HR Hub is a living resource, and it will continue to evolve and grow as new services and offerings are designed and deployed.

Over the next 12 months, we will continue to expand and enhance the HR Hub resources and services in partnership with Member offices, the Committee on House Administration, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and the Modernization Committee. We look forward to our continued collaboration on this effort throughout the year.

TRANSITION AIDE PROGRAM

In support of the 117th Congressional Transition, and in accordance with the Select Committee's recommendation, the CAO launched the Transition Aide Program in November 2020 to provide each Member-elect with a CAO-paid staffer to assist with the logistics and operations needed to prepare new Members and their offices for the 117th Congress. Out of 61 Members-elect, 50 participated in the program, and the CAO's Office of Payroll and Benefits onboarded the 50 Transition Aides at the beginning of New Member Orientation.

During New Member Orientation, the Transition Aides participated in orientation briefings, including office setup briefings to learn the procedures for setting up both D.C. and district offices. Additionally, they attended a series of trainings, including two House financial curriculum trainings

offered by the Office of Finance. This training ensured Aides could assist the staff of Members-elect in completing their appointment packages for submission to the Office of Payroll and Benefits at the start of the 117th Congressional session.

Upon the conclusion of the Transition Aides' employment with the CAO, 47 of the 50 Aides were hired into various D.C. and district office roles by their respective Member offices and were able to hit the ground running at the start of the new Congress. The CAO has started planning for the 118th Congressional Transition and will be continuing this program for the next Member-elect class.

TASK FORCE ON A DIVERSE AND TALENTED HOUSE WORKFORCE

At the direction of the Subcommittee on Legislative Branch Appropriations, the CAO – in conjunction with the Select Committee, the Committee on House Administration, my fellow House Officers, and other stakeholders – established a Task Force on a Diverse and Talented House Workforce. The Task Force developed a charter establishing the high-level goals for the team with the aim of improving human resource management practices throughout the House, including improvements to how the House recruits, retains, and develops a diverse and talented workforce. By having these stakeholders and decisionmakers providing guidance and feedback to the Task Force, we are well-positioned to prioritize our efforts and focus on initiatives that have the greatest impact for House employees.

The Task Force will build on the substantial progress the House has made in a variety of areas, including the Speaker raising the maximum annual rate of pay for staff; the Appropriations Committee working to fund increased staff salaries; and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion improving access to critical compensation and diversity information about the House workforce through its Compensation and Diversity Survey. The Task Force will enlist subject matter experts from across the House, including the CAO, the Sergeant at Arms, the Office of the Clerk, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion,

the Office of Employee Advocacy, and the Office of Employment Assistance to continue this important work.

Currently, the Task Force is examining benefits, staff training, and possible improvements to data about our workforce, including compensation and diversity data. My staff and I look forward to our work with the Task Force and continuing to make the House a more open, inviting, and rewarding workplace for all staff.

CONGRESSIONAL STAFF ACADEMY – CAO COACH PROGRAM

Our new staff training program, called CAO Coach, is a branch of the Congressional Staff Academy. CAO Coach was launched in June 2021, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. CAO Coach aims to train staff to do their jobs in a way that is relevant, efficient, and dynamic. To date, we've hired four coaches, evenly split between parties. On staff, we have two experienced former Chiefs of Staff and two experienced former District Directors. In the coming months, we plan to add two recent Legislative Directors and further build out the program and its offerings.

The Coaches have “walked the walk” as staff and are acutely aware of what is required to succeed at the House. They have hosted highly attended programs featuring their colleagues as panelists on topics like *Coping with Emotional Casework*, *The Chief of Staff-District Director Relationship*, *De-Escalating Challenging Situations in a Congressional Office*, and *Parenting as a Staffer*. The Coaches are also creating a “101” video series for every job position in a House office, hosting staff networking events, helping to facilitate retreats, and providing customized trainings at the request of Member offices.

They have collected and shared hundreds of best practice documents and videos with staff. A CAO Coach website that will host these materials and all of their recorded programming is currently under development.

The Coaches also do one-on-one sessions with staff. These sessions have proven to be far more popular than we anticipated. Since they began offering the sessions, the coaches have had more than 485 confidential sessions with individual staffers on topics ranging from managing office budgets and staff to approaching difficult casework to how to introduce a bill.

I appreciate and share the Modernization Committee's interest in training programs for both Members and staff. Congress will work better and we will retain more Members and staff if we train and support them. Too often, Members and staff become discouraged because they join the House without a strong understanding of Member office operations. The House has 441 offices that do the same work – work that is done nowhere outside of the offices on Capitol Hill and the districts. Time is often wasted with each office re-inventing the wheel because there's not enough institutional focus on House-specific job training.

CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR MEMBERS

The CAO is implementing the Select Committee's recommendation to create a Congressional Leadership Academy to offer training specifically for Members. As we prepare to roll out this new program, the CAO is currently hiring and training a diverse team of world-class leadership consultants to work with Members on the leadership, management, and resiliency skills necessary to thrive in our challenging and dynamic environment. Stay tuned for much more information about this program later this month.

EXPANSION OF VIDEO, TECHNOLOGY, AND TELEWORK TOOLS

The COVID-19 pandemic made robust and reliable video and telework tools critical to the operations of the House. In 2020, the CAO worked rapidly to acquire licenses for House offices to the popular, in-demand web conferencing tools Webex and Zoom. These platforms have ensured the continuity of House operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Committees have been able to conduct hearings, business meetings, markups, and other events safely and remotely using these tools and with the support of the CAO's House Information Resources and House Recording Studio teams. Between May 2020 and December 2021, a total of 1,847 Committee events have been conducted using the Webex or Zoom platforms, including hearings, briefings, forums, official business meetings, markups, roundtables, and rehearsals.

Additionally, the implementation of the Webex web conferencing platform at the House made video counseling sessions possible for the House community, provided by the Office of Employee Assistance (OEA), starting in March 2021. This enabled staff to receive face-to-face support from OEA counselors from anywhere with an internet connection. To date, the OEA has conducted 825 video sessions, which encompasses 15 percent of its counseling sessions.

Microsoft Office 365, implemented fully across the House in August 2019, has ensured offices have access to work resources from anywhere at any time. The Microsoft Teams platform has facilitated remote meetings and collaboration for many House offices working remotely. From 2020 through 2021, nearly 475,000 Teams meetings were conducted for a total of 730,524 hours of meeting time among House Members and staff. Approximately 64 percent of those Teams meetings included video content. Over that same timeframe, more than 46.5 million messages were sent using the Teams platform. In 2021, more than 87,000 documents were shared with House staff actively collaborating on them.

IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY OF HOUSE WEBSITES

To address the Select Committee’s recommendation to improve access to Congressional websites for individuals with disabilities, the CAO’s House Web Services team launched its Web Accessibility Program in September 2019 for House websites. Through the program, the Web Services team ensures that House websites are in compliance with statutory requirements aimed at improving access to Congressional websites for individuals with disabilities. Since the Web Accessibility Program launched, the team has remediated 508 Accessibility violations for the new platform on which Member websites run, as well as the underlying themes for those websites. The team has also remediated 82 Member websites and achieved a compliance score of 90 percent or above. The compliance score is determined through a third-party evaluation service that runs automated checks based on rules adopted by the Worldwide Web Consortium and determines how well websites meet international web content accessibility guidelines. A score of 90 percent is considered the equivalent of an “A” report card score, and it is our goal to meet or beat that score.

We will continue to run Member websites through accessibility remediation until all sites have been remediated for accessibility compliance. As we bring websites into compliance, they then shift into continuous monitoring via the House’s third-party accessibility checker, which helps ensure the sites continue to meet or exceed our accessibility standards. To date, Web Services has enabled continuous monitoring for 138 House-managed Member, Committee, and Leadership websites and 20 vendor-designed websites.

To assist staff in House offices who manage their Member’s or Committee’s website, the Web Services team offered instructor-led web accessibility trainings and collaborated with the Congressional Staff Academy to design and publish an on-demand training option. In the year ahead, the Web Services and Staff Academy teams will continue to develop and improve these training opportunities, allowing

House web content editors to maintain their websites in a manner that ensures accessibility for all individuals.

DIGITAL SIGNATURES

To address the Select Committee’s recommendations to expand the use of digital signatures for a majority of House business, CAO teams have made significant progress on a few different fronts: expanding the use of digital signatures for Congressional group letters, constituent correspondence, and administrative forms.

Digital Signatures for Congressional Group Letters – Quill

In May 2021, the CAO launched Quill, an e-signature platform used to create letters, gather signatures, and track progress of letters from start to finish. Quill was originally developed by the Senate and was modified for the House by the CAO. Quill provides a robust, secure, in-House platform to support group letters for Members of Congress. As of December 31, 2021, more than 430 Member and Committee offices were enrolled in Quill.

In late 2021, the Quill team collaborated with the Senate on updates to the system and created an advisory group with staff from Member and Committee offices that helped develop feature and functionality requests to improve Quill. As the annual Appropriations cycle ramps up during the months ahead, we are very pleased to be able to offer Quill as a tool for legislative staff who will be generating tens of thousands of Member group letters.

Electronic Signatures for Constituent Casework

To simplify the workflow of submitting and receiving casework and privacy release forms, House Web Services introduced a digital signature capability in 2019 for submitting these forms on Member websites to reduce processing requirements for offices and to streamline constituents’

experiences in working with Member offices. These forms are currently used on 265 Member office websites.

In 2021, House Web Services updated the Digital Privacy Release Form for IRS-related casework to include a new section for businesses to enter their information for IRS inquiries, along with other essential updates, such as requests for tax years, additional IRS forms, and whether another elected official was contacted. Implementation of digital signature options for forms, such as the ones mentioned above, helps to simplify the casework process for constituents and Member offices alike.

Electronic Signatures for Administrative House Forms

The CAO has also initiated a project to modernize and simplify many of its administrative forms that require a Member signature, such as payroll, Student Loan Repayment Program, and inventory forms. The forms will be streamlined and simplified through a modern development platform that provides notifications and online form approval, including approval via email. Once completed, the forms – and their accompanying electronic signatures – will be stored in the system of record for the lifecycle of the form. This new administrative form system is scheduled to be implemented this year using our most-used form, the Payroll Authorization Form.

HOUSE DIGITAL SERVICE

The Select Committee has issued several recommendations related to improving Member access to innovative technology tools that enhance their offices' operations. In response to these recommendations, the CAO is building an innovative House Digital Service team of technology experts skilled in customer relations and business analysis, design, and implementation. Our intention is to leverage fellows from other agencies and the private sector – as appropriate – and expand the House Digital Service team over time.

The House Digital Service team's responsibilities will be:

- Identifying and delivering intuitive solutions that improve on Member offices' most significant challenges.
- Bringing ideas and methodologies from the private sector into spaces within the House that have more freedom to experiment and iterate.
- Leveraging modern development stacks to rapidly prototype and build production-grade software and deliver better products and services to the House.

Currently, the CAO is leading a procurement process with the intention to recommend the acquisition of an industry-leading, cloud-based Constituent Relationship Management platform (or constituent database) that provides Members with modern and innovative tools to manage their constituent engagement. Once awarded, the Digital Service team will assume a major role in the implementation and development of this new platform.

CHALLENGES TO PROGRESS

The CAO, House leadership, and our partners across the House have made substantial progress on these modernization efforts. The Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee has established a modernization account that we have used to fund initiatives. We have also established very effective working relationships among decisionmakers, including the Select Committee, that informs how we prioritize our work. During the past year, the CAO has also improved our project portfolio and project management processes. We analyze initiatives based on their value to the House and whether they will advance modernization recommendations.

However, some of the recommendations require significant ongoing funding, such as modernization of the House payroll system, expanding benefits to House employees, or creating new programs or services for Members and staff. We will not be able to accomplish everything at once. In many ways, how we prioritize these recommendations is almost as important as the recommendations

themselves. In order to make the most use of the funds established in the House modernization account, we must balance all of the requests we receive to ensure we provide the best services possible with the funding allocated to us.

CONCLUSION

The efforts of the Select Committee to further modernize the House are tremendous and commendable. I am honored that I – and my employees – can play a critical role in implementing the recommendations established by the Select Committee. Finally, I would like to thank the Members and staff of the Modernization Committee for your support. We look forward to our continued constructive relationship.