

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2026

HEARINGS BEFORE A SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION

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LORI GROVES ROWLEY AND APRIL LYMAN
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LEGISLATIVE BRANCH APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2026

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, CONGRES- SIONAL BUDGET OFFICE, AND THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

WITNESSES

**HON. GENE L. DODARO, COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED
STATES**

**HON. HUGH NATHANIAL HALPERN, DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT PUB-
LISHING OFFICE**

**PHILLIP L. SWAGEL, PH.D., DIRECTOR, CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OF-
FICE**

Mr. VALADAO. The subcommittee will come to order.

The subject of today's hearing is the fiscal year 2026 budget requests for the Government Accountability Office, GAO; the Government Publishing Office, the GPO; and the Congressional Budget Office, the CBO.

I would like to thank Ranking Member Espaillet, our committee members, Comptroller General Dodaro, Director Halpern, and Director Swagel for being here today.

I would also like to thank each and every one of your staff for the work they do to help Congress and the entire government function in an effective and efficient manner.

The Government Accountability Office's fiscal year 2026 budget request totals nearly \$934 million, a 15-percent increase from the enacted fiscal year 2025 CR.

The U.S. Government Publishing Office requests \$135 million for fiscal year 2026, a modest increase of 2.6 percent.

And the Congressional Budget Office's fiscal year 2026 request is \$75.8 million, an increase of 8.2 percent.

Thank you again for joining us today, and I look forward to hearing your testimonies and learning more about your budget priorities for fiscal year 2026.

I now recognize Ranking Member Espaillet for his opening remarks.

Mr. ESPAILLET. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all.

Mr. Dodaro—is that right?

Mr. DODARO. Close enough.

Mr. ESPAILLET. Okay. Coming from "Espaillet," I can feel your pain.

But Mr. Swagel and Halpern, thank you all for being here today. And I commend each of you and your staff for your efforts reinforcing Congress's constitutional power and role of the power of the purse that we have here and dedicating your resources to keep up with that constitutional mandate.

Mr. Dodaro, it is my understanding that your term ends in December. Your commitment to government at the GAO has been unwavering. We commend you for your efforts, your work. And we hope that you enjoy and you kick up your feet and feel the tropical breeze somewhere.

But, also, for fiscal year 2026, the GAO has requested, as was said, \$933 million, an increase of 15 percent. We look forward to hearing about that.

The Congressional Budget Office has requested \$75.8 million, representing an 8.2-percent increase. We spoke about that already, and we hope to hear more about that.

And the Government Publishing Office has requested \$135 million, an increase of 2.6 percent. And we look forward to talking about that.

And I hope that we have a good discussion to understand where these proposals are going and the impact that it will have on the American people and the districts that we represent.

But we thank you all for your service.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Espaillat.

I now recognize Comptroller General Dodaro.

Your full testimony has been submitted for the record, and you are now recognized to provide a summary of your testimony.

STATEMENT OF HON. GENE L. DODARO

Mr. DODARO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Espaillat, members of the subcommittee. I am very pleased to be here today to discuss GAO's 2026 budget request.

I appreciate the support this committee has given us in the past. We have returned handsomely on that investment. Last year, as a result of implementation of our savings, about \$68 billion in financial benefits accrued to the government. Over the last 6 years, we have returned \$123 for every dollar that you have given us at the GAO.

This year, for example, we updated our High Risk List which we keep of areas we believe to be at risk of fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, or in need of broad-based transformation. That work has saved almost \$760 billion over the years, about \$40 billion a year.

That includes the Medicare and Medicaid program, weapons systems acquisitions, Bureau of Prisons, VA healthcare, oversight of medical products, food safety, et cetera. It is a very expansive list of some of the most important functions of the Federal Government, including tax administration.

This year, we added improving the delivery of disaster assistance. FEMA is stretched way too thin. They are still managing 600 disaster declarations, some dating back 20 years. There needs to be reform. Over 30 Federal agencies participate in this activity. Sur-

vivors are confused on where to get assistance, particularly in the recovery period, which has a long tail over time.

Our work highlighting annual reports on overlap, duplication, and fragmentation of the Federal Government has been producing good results. We have had over 2,000 recommendations. Seventy-three percent have been fully or partially implemented. That has saved \$667 billion to the Federal Government. We will be releasing our next report, this year's report, next month, and so we will have additional opportunities.

The reason we are asking for an increase is, we had a modest increase back from 2023 to 2024 of 2.7 percent increase, and, of course, we have held flat this year in fiscal 2025. We have had to absorb cost-of-living increases of over 5 percent in 2024 to 2 percent last year.

So our staffing level is down, while demand from the Congress remains high for GAO work. We get over 600 requests a year for assistance from the Congress. Many of them come in the form of the highest priority, which is statutory mandates and committee or conference reports. For example, the latest NDAA has 95 mandates for GAO's work; FAA Reauthorization and the Water Resources Act have another 50. That is on top of 150 recurring mandates we have that prompt our work every year, like auditing the financial statements of the Federal Government, for example.

So we are very much looking forward to your careful consideration of our request.

We are also asking for resources to help us strengthen our computer security defenses. You know, a lot of the attention recently about efficiency in the government or whatever has raised our profile. You know, we are anticipating and seeing more hits on our website by threat actors and others. It is up about 30 percent this year from what it was last year, and last year was high. So we need some money in order to be able to do that as well.

We are also asking for money to help maintain our headquarters building. We are in the process now of renting out additional parts of that building to bring in some additional revenue that can help offset the costs of that building.

And then, lastly, we are asking for the ability to have independent leasing authority for our field offices. Now, our headquarters building, GAO is the sole custodian, so we don't rely on GSA. But in the field, we have to rely on GSA. And, of course, they are in the process now of trying to cancel a lot of leases, but since we are in the legislative branch, it is not appropriate for them to have control over our leases. That is why we have independent authority over our personnel in GAO, since we are an independent, you know, audit organization. The leasing ability in the field is the last remaining piece that we need to be totally independent from the executive branch that we audit on a regular basis. So I would ask for careful consideration on that issue.

Since it is my last year, in closing, I also want to commend the GAO people for their service to the Congress and the country. We have one of the most dedicated and talented workforces in the world, and I am just very proud of them. And even though I will be gone, they will carry on in the finest tradition to serve this committee, this Congress, and this country.

Thank you very much.
[The information follows:]



The U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G. Street, NW Washington, DC 20548

Biography



Gene L. Dodaro became the eighth Comptroller General of the United States and head of the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) on December 22, 2010, when he was confirmed by the United States Senate. He was nominated by President Obama in September of 2010 from a list of candidates selected by a bipartisan, bicameral congressional commission. He had been serving as Acting Comptroller General since March of 2008.

In a GAO career dating back more than 50 years, Mr. Dodaro has testified before Congress dozens of times on important national issues, including the nation's response to the coronavirus pandemic, the federal government's long term fiscal outlook, efforts to reduce and eliminate overlap and duplication across the federal government and GAO's "High Risk List" that focuses on specific challenges—from reducing improper payments under Medicare and Medicaid to improving the Pentagon's business practices. In addition, Mr. Dodaro continues to develop GAO's efforts to meet the needs of Congress in such areas as science, technology and cybersecurity.

As Comptroller General, Mr. Dodaro helps oversee the development and issuance of hundreds of reports and testimonies each year to various committees and individual Members of Congress. These and other GAO products have led to hearings and legislation, billions of dollars in taxpayer savings, and improvements to a wide range of government programs and services.



United States Government Accountability Office

Testimony
Before the Subcommittee on the
Legislative Branch, Committee on
Appropriations, U.S. House of
Representatives

For Release on Delivery
Expected at 9:00a.m. ET
Wednesday, April 9, 2025

FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET REQUEST

U.S. Government
Accountability Office

Statement of Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-108401](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Background

GAO's mission is to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people. GAO's work spans the full breadth and scope of the federal government's responsibilities.

Congress relies on GAO's nonpartisan, objective, and high-quality work to help inform congressional deliberations as well as oversight of the executive branch. GAO routinely conducts work for the Chair or Ranking Members for over 90 percent of all standing committees.

Since fiscal year 2002, GAO's work has resulted in over:

- \$1.45 trillion dollars in financial benefits; and
- Over 29,000 program and operational benefits that helped to change laws, improve public safety, and promote sound management throughout government.

For more information, contact Nicole Clowers at CongRel@gao.gov.

April 9, 2025

FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET REQUEST

U.S. Government Accountability Office

In fiscal year 2024, GAO's work yielded over \$67.5 billion in financial benefits. Our average return on investment for the past 6 years is \$123 for every dollar invested in GAO. In fiscal year 2024, GAO also identified 1,232 programmatic and operational benefits that led to improved services to the American people, strengthened public safety, and spurred improvements across government. Congress routinely uses GAO's work to inform key legislative decisions. For example, based on GAO recommendations, Congress:

- directed DOD to establish minimum standards for military housing to address poor conditions;
- required the FAA to develop a strategy to safely integrate drones into the national airspace; and
- directed the National Nuclear Security Administration to improve cybersecurity practices.

By the Numbers: A look at our FY 2024 accomplishments



Source: GAO. | GAO-25-108401

GAO's fiscal year 2026 request reflects continued high demand for GAO services. Over the past 4 years, GAO has received, on average, 627 new congressional requests for studies each year, which includes requests from committee leadership and mandates (provisions in legislation and related reports). For example, the latest National Defense Authorization Act and related reports included 95 mandates for GAO; the Water Resources Development Act of 2024 included 26 mandates; and the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2024 included 36 mandates. In addition to conducting work for new mandates, GAO has over 150 mandates that have recurring reporting requirements. For example, GAO performs annual financial audits of the SEC, FDIC, and IRS, among others. GAO also provides an increasing amount of technical assistance to Members and committees. In fiscal year 2024, GAO provided over 1,100 instances of this informal, quick-turnaround assistance.

GAO's fiscal year 2026 budget request is for \$933.9 million in appropriated funds and \$72.2 million in offsetting receipts. GAO's workforce is projected to shrink by 126 employees in fiscal year 2025 due to the full-year continuing resolution. The fiscal year 2026 budget request would allow GAO to build back some, but not all,

United States Government Accountability Office

of this loss. These resources will enable GAO to meet the priority needs of the Congress including five key areas of importance to the nation and Congress:

- **National Security Enterprise.** GAO evaluates an array of national security efforts in areas such as military readiness, major weapons systems acquisitions, space programs, and the U.S. nuclear complex. The size and complexity of these efforts continue to grow; the fiscal year 2025 continuing resolution increased defense spending by \$6 billion over fiscal year 2024 enacted levels.
- **Science and Technology.** There is growing demand for GAO's science and technology work. GAO has focused on enhancing this area to meet increased demands from Congress. GAO's science and technology team, for example, provided over 90 technical consultations to Congress in 2024 alone. GAO's portfolio of ongoing and future work includes many aspects of artificial intelligence, medical research and applications, critical minerals recovery, and quantum computing.
- **Fraud Prevention.** GAO examines government efforts to safeguard programs from fraud by focusing agencies more on prevention. In 2024, GAO estimated the federal government lost between \$233 billion and \$521 billion annually between fiscal years 2018-2022. Similarly, GAO reported that agencies estimated \$162 billion in improper payments in 2024, but this does not represent the full extent of this problem.
- **Cybersecurity.** GAO assesses the development and execution of a comprehensive national cybersecurity strategy, the cybersecurity of 16 critical infrastructure sectors across the U.S., and the security of federal information systems.
- **Health Care Costs.** GAO examines the sustainability and integrity of the Medicare and Medicaid programs, Veterans Affairs, DOD, and Indian Health Service health care services.

The fiscal year 2026 budget request will also allow GAO to address internal operational needs as well as critical projects and initiatives deferred in fiscal year 2025. Specifically, GAO will advance ongoing IT modernization, cloud management, and storage solutions initiatives while also enhancing internal cyber security controls. Additionally, GAO will continue space optimization projects at both our headquarters building and field offices to increase leasable space and address critical building infrastructure enhancements to improve safety, strengthen reliability, and reduce costs.

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Subcommittee,

I would like to express my appreciation for the support this Subcommittee has shown GAO in the past few years. With your help we have made great progress in saving federal funds and achieving our mission of improving government efficiency, performance, and accountability. Our average return on investment for the past 6 years is \$123 for every dollar invested in GAO. In addition, GAO achieved over 7,700 government-wide program and operational benefits across government.

The fiscal year (FY) 2026 budget request will allow GAO to continue to meet the priority needs of Congress and contribute to a more efficient and accountable government.

GAO's Work Improves Government Efficiency and Effectiveness

GAO continues to demonstrate its value. In FY 2024 alone, our work generated over \$67.5 billion in financial benefits and 1,232 other program and operational benefits. We issued 718 reports, over 550 legal decisions, and handled about 1,800 bid protests. GAO experts testified 60 times before 39 separate committees or subcommittees on topics including improving veterans' access to healthcare in rural areas, F-35 costs and engine modernization, challenges related to preventing and recovering disability insurance overpayments, and defense and civilian applications of artificial intelligence.

Agencies use our work to improve their operations and performance, and Congress uses it to inform key legislative decisions. For example, consistent with our recommendation, the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the most recent NDAA prohibits the Navy from obligating or expending any funds authorized for FY 2025 for the construction of a Constellation-class frigate until approval of a high level of design completion by the designated technical authority.

In FY 2024, we also made 1,484 new recommendations. On average, over 75 percent of recommendations that we make are implemented within 4 years. We achieve this high implementation rate because our reports provide evidence-based, convincing findings and constructive recommendations. After we issue the report, we also regularly follow-up with the agency leaders and the Congress to spur implementation.

Addressing our recommendations improves government efficiency and effectiveness. For example, as we reported in March 2025, efforts to address issues on our [High-Risk List](#) have led to nearly \$759 billion in

financial benefits—an average of \$40 billion per year. Similarly, agency and congressional efforts to address issues that we have identified in our annual [Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication](#) report has yielded about \$667 billion in financial benefits.

Addressing all remaining open recommendations would generate tens of billions of additional financial benefits for the government¹. For example, GAO has recommended that Congress consider equalizing the rates Medicare pays for certain health care services, which often vary depending on whether the service is performed in hospital or office settings. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that equalizing payment rates could result in \$156.9 billion in financial benefits from fiscal years 2025 through 2034.

FY 2026 Budget Request

For FY 2026, GAO is requesting \$933.9 million in appropriated funds. This is a 15.0 percent increase over the FY 2025 full year Continuing Resolution (CR) level and uses \$72.2 million in offsetting receipts, reimbursements, and collections. (See appendix I, Table 1) As a result of operating at full-year CR funding levels in FY 2025, critical GAO mission-related activities have been halted or slowed and on-board staffing levels are projected to drop from 3,571 to 3,445 employees. (See appendix 1, Table 2) The reduction in staffing levels is impacting operations across the agency. Our FY 2026 budget request will allow us to build back some of this loss of staff and expertise. As a knowledge-based, professional services organization, our people are our greatest assets.

The FY 2026 budget request will allow GAO to continue to meet the high demand for our work. Over the past four years GAO averaged 627 requests and mandates per year from over 90 percent of the standing committees of the Congress, supporting a broad range of congressional interests. For example, the 2024 NDAA included 95 mandates; the Water Resources Development Act of 2024 included 26 mandates; and the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 included 36 mandates. In addition to conducting work for new mandates, we have over 150 mandates that have recurring reporting requirements; for example, we perform annual financial audits of the SEC, FDIC, and IRS, among others.

This demand has continued in FY 2025. Through March 31, 2025, we have received 190 requests and mandates. Bills pending before

¹ GAO, Open GAO Recommendations: Financial Benefits Could Be Between \$106 Billion and \$208 Billion [GAO-24-107146](#), Jul 11, 2024

Congress include additional mandates. For example, the Senate bill for Coast Guard Reauthorization Act includes 12 mandates and the House bill for Homeland Security Improvement Act includes 7 mandates. We have also testified 21 times so far this fiscal year on topics of national importance. These include modernizing the air traffic control system, improving navy shipbuilding acquisition practices, combatting fraud and improper payments, and improving the federal approach to disaster assistance. Our expert witnesses are frequently praised by committee leadership for their breadth and depth of knowledge.

In addition to our reports and testimonies, we use our in-depth knowledge of federal programs to provide technical assistance to committees and Members. Technical assistance is informal, quick turnaround assistance, such as data analysis, hearing prep assistance, and draft legislation review. In FY 2024, the first year we began tracking these services, we provided over 1,100 instances of technical assistance. For the first half of FY 2025, we have provided 560 instances of this assistance.

The FY 2026 budget request will allow GAO to continue to provide Congress with fact-based, nonpartisan information and analysis that address both longstanding and emerging national interests. Specifically, our request will enable GAO to review the most important national and international issues facing our nation. These include.

- National Security. The latest U.S. National Security Strategy emphasized the importance of a more modern U.S. military in the face of threats from global strategic competition, among other policy priorities. The size and complexity of these efforts continue to grow; the FY 2026 continuing resolution increased defense spending by \$6 billion over FY 2024 enacted levels. GAO evaluates federal efforts across the spectrum of global national security activities, including military readiness, major weapons system acquisitions, space programs, and the modernization of our nuclear complex.
- Science and Technology. Demand for our science and technology work continues to grow. Accordingly, GAO has focused on enhancing its capabilities in this area of continuously evolving rapid developments in our society affecting both the public and private sectors. In committee reports, Committees have frequently indicated they are pleased with our science and technology work and encouraged us to continue to expand our capabilities in this area.

In response to provisions in the FY 2025 House and Senate committee reports, we issued a [report](#) that details our efforts to meet congressional

needs for science and technology research and analysis. We reported that our science and technology team has published 32 in-depth technology assessments, 53 2-page Spotlights explaining key emerging technologies and their implications, and dozens of other products on a range of issues. These include the use of artificial intelligence in defense and civilian applications, quantum computing, regenerative medicine, and medical research, along with critical mineral recovery and technology transfer. The team also regularly provides support to Congress on impromptu, real-time advice and consultation, providing over 90 technical consultations to Congress in 2024 alone.

- **Fraud Prevention.** The unprecedented amount of fraud in pandemic programs highlighted the urgent need for better implementation of leading practices for fraud risk management. GAO's A Framework for Managing Fraud Risks in Federal Programs is now embedded in legislation and OMB circulars. In 2024, we issued our first estimate of government-wide fraud. GAO estimated the federal government lost between \$233 billion and \$521 billion annually during FYs 2018-2022.

During that period, GAO made about 130 recommendations and Matters for Congressional Consideration to address fraud-related issues and to improve fraud risk management. Much more needs to be done to safeguard federal spending.

- **Cybersecurity.** Escalating threats, including new and more destructive attacks from around the globe, highlight the critical and persistent need for effective cybersecurity. Our work will continue to assess multiple priorities, such as the development and execution of a comprehensive national cybersecurity strategy, the security of the 16 critical infrastructure sectors identified by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency², and the security of federal information systems.
- **Health Care Costs.** GAO continues to examine the sustainability and integrity of the Medicare and Medicaid programs, and overseeing VA, DOD, and Indian Health Service health care services. Health care spending now accounts for around 27 percent of the federal budget and is one of the fastest growing federal expenditures. Future growth will be driven, in part, by the aging of the population and the increasing cost of health care.

² The 16 sectors include Agriculture and Food, Chemical, Commercial Facilities, Communications, Critical Manufacturing, Dams, Defense Industrial Base, Emergency Services, Energy, Financial Services, Government Facilities, Public Health, Information Technology, Nuclear Reactors and Materials, Transportation Systems, Water and Wastewater Systems

GAO carries out sophisticated and in-depth work on these and other issues of national importance. Because our work spans the full range of government programs and spending, we must hire and retain a multidisciplinary staff. GAO staff have wide-ranging expertise from many academic fields, including engineering, biology, computer science, cybersecurity, public policy, accounting, law, physics, economics, criminal justice, finance, business, and nursing, among others.

About 72 percent of GAO analysts have advanced degrees in their field of study. GAO attracts and retains this talent by offering a compelling mission and a positive working environment. In March 2025, for the fifth straight year, the Partnership for Public Service ranked GAO as first among mid-size federal agencies as the “best place to work”.

Finally, the budget request will also allow us to address internal operational needs. These requirements include IT modernization, cloud data management and storage, and enhancing cyber security controls. In addition, GAO is continuing space optimization projects for both the headquarters building and field offices. We are also pursuing critical physical infrastructure enhancements to improve safety, strengthen reliability, and save costs.

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions.

Appendix I: Summary of Resources and Staffing

Table 1: FY 2024–2026 Summary of Resources by Program

Dollars in thousands

Program	Fiscal Year 2024 Actual		Fiscal Year 2025 Full Year CR ^a		Fiscal Year 2026 Request		Net Change Fiscal Year 2025 / 2026	
	FTE	Amount	FTE	Amount	FTE	Amount	FTE	Amount
Human capital	3,564	\$730,139	3,543	\$757,834	3,505	\$793,380	(38)	\$35,546
Engagement support		11,625		7,500		12,900		5,400
Infrastructure operations		145,276		112,857		188,350		75,493
Office of Inspector General	12	2,746	17	4,677	23	6,808	6	2,131
Center for Audit Excellence		4,498		4,500		4,730		230
IJA FY 2024 No-Year Direct Carry Over		917		0		0		0
Lapse		556		0		0		0
Total budget authority	3,576	\$895,757	3,560	\$887,368	3,528	\$1,006,168	(32)	\$118,800
Offsets ^b		(\$83,863)		(\$75,474)		(\$72,189)		\$3,285
Appropriation^c		\$811,894		\$811,894		\$933,979	(32)	\$122,085

Source: GAO. | GAO-25-108401

^aFY 2025 Full Year CR column represents GAO's implemented Operating Plan. We anticipate updating the plan in May without impacting the FY 2026 request.

^bIncludes offsetting receipts and reimbursements from program and financial audits; rental income; training fees, collection of bid protest system user fees, supplemental funds for specific program oversight and pandemic related audits.

^cSalaries and Expenses Appropriation includes \$5.0 million in no-year funding to evaluate program spending pursuant to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (PL 117-58). FY 2025 offsets includes \$917 thousand of these funds carried forward from FY 2024.

Table 2: FY 2024–FY 2026 Staffing Summary

Salaries and Benefits	Fiscal Year 2024 Actual	Fiscal Year 2025 Full Year CR ^a	Net Change Fiscal Year 2024/ 2025	Fiscal Year 2026 Request	Net Change Fiscal Year 2025/ 2026
Number of full-time equivalents (FTEs)	3,576	3,560	(16)	3,528	(32)
Number of staff on board at year end	3,571	3,445	(126)	3,567	122

Source: GAO. | GAO-25-108401

^aStaffing estimates are revised as data on actual onboarding and attrition is collected

GAO's Mission

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Mr. VALADAO. I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Dodaro.
I now recognize Mr. Halpern for a summary of his written testimony.

STATEMENT OF HON. HUGH NATHANIAL HALPERN

Mr. HALPERN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Espallat. I am pleased to be here to present GPO's fiscal year 2026 appropriations request.

On behalf of my 1,649 teammates, thank you so much for your support in the past and your ongoing support for GPO.

Our request is for \$135.4 million for fiscal year 2026, which is an increase of about \$3.4 million over our fiscal year 2025 appropriation. This incorporates increased labor and material costs, while accommodating certain important initiatives for Congress and the rest of the legislative branch.

Our fiscal year 2026 request represents a 2.6 percent increase over fiscal year 2025, less than the CPI increase over the prior 12 months.

GPO operates as a business enterprise, and directly appropriated funds only represent about 9 percent of our total revenue. In fiscal year 2024, the remainder of our nearly \$1.3 billion in revenue came from GPO's billings to its other Federal customers, including the Department of State, National Archives, Department of Defense, and countless others. We sell products and services to those customers and adjust pricing based on the cost of labor, equipment, materials, and overhead.

As most of GPO's appropriations requests are based on funding for Congress's own publishing needs and the agency's administration of the Federal Depository Library Program, we have also had to increase our appropriations request when faced with increased costs.

Our model continues to deliver results. We closed our books for fiscal year 2024 with a net positive income of \$57.5 million, enabling us to continue investing in our team, our equipment, and our campus. It is also important to note that, given the conditions with our customers and increased materials costs, I expect our net income to be lower in fiscal year 2025, though still positive.

Our fiscal year 2026 request includes \$83 million for congressional publishing, which is flat-funded from the prior several years. It is based on our estimate of Congress's likely needs, informed by historical trends and available unexpended balances, and we have factored in increased costs for raw material and labor.

Our request for the Public Information Programs account, which lets us fund the Federal Depository Library Program, is about \$42.9 million. That does represent an increase of about \$5 million over fiscal year 2025, largely due to increased labor costs.

Our final request is for \$9.5 million for GPO's revolving fund to support key technology upgrades, and our request for this account is about \$2 million lower than it has been in the past.

Forty percent of that amount will support continued development of XPub, which is our next-generation composition engine. We are continuing to push forward with the final stages of development of XPub for bills, resolutions, and amendments. To date, we are on track with the first phase of user acceptance testing with the Sen-

ate, and I am pleased to report that the House began testing last month. While I don't have a firm deployment date, we are continuing to make significant progress with our customers and hope to deploy this critical piece of software soon.

The remainder of our revolving fund request is for funds to support GovInfo, our online trusted digital repository. The data in that system supports the Library of Congress, Congress's own bulk data efforts, and dozens of other Federal agencies, enabling Americans to access government information digitally rather than just in print. The system receives more than 142 million requests a month, and the subcommittee's support allowed us to add 260,000 document packages to the system last fiscal year.

Lastly, our budget request includes our Inspector General's full \$7.7 million budget request, which will be funded as part of GPO's agency overhead.

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and members of the subcommittee, thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today, for your continued support, and the support of your staff. And I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

[The information follows:]



Hugh Nathaniel Halpern, GPO Director

Hugh Nathaniel Halpern is the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) Director, the agency's chief executive officer. The agency is responsible for publishing and printing information for the three branches of the Federal Government. Halpern is the 28th person to lead GPO since the agency opened its doors for business on March 4, 1861, the same day Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as the 16th President of the United States. President Donald Trump nominated Halpern to be GPO Director on October 17, 2019, and the U.S. Senate confirmed him on December 4, 2019.



Biography

Prior to coming to GPO, Halpern held a succession of leadership positions during his 30 years on Capitol Hill. He served as the Director of Floor Operations for the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. In that role, Halpern was the highest-ranking floor staffer in the House and served as Speaker Paul Ryan's Chief Advisor on all procedural matters. He managed the daily floor operations of the House, served as the liaison to all leadership offices, and oversaw legislative interactions between The White House, House and Senate. In 2018, he received the John W. McCormack Award of Excellence, the highest award given to a staff member in the House. The award recognizes a lifetime of bipartisan service to the House.

In addition to his position in the Speaker's Office, Halpern has more than a decade of experience serving on the senior leadership staff. He has a proven track record of successfully leading teams to achieve results.

During his career, he served half a dozen different committees in both policy development and procedural roles. During his 11 years on the House Committee on Rules, Halpern served as Staff Director leading the management and terms of debate on the House floor. In 2001, he was named General Counsel by Chairman Mike Oxley for the newly established House Committee on Financial Services. During his tenure, the committee provided legislation addressing terrorist financing and money laundering, improving investor confidence in the wake of the Enron and WorldCom scandals and granting consumers important new tools to fight identity theft. During the 1990s, Halpern served on the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, where he handled a variety of legislative issues, including automobile safety, insurance, FTC consumer protection and tobacco regulation. Halpern began his career in Congress as an intern for Rep. E.G. "Bud" Shuster in 1987.

Halpern served a number of temporary positions during his time on Capitol Hill. He was the Parliamentarian to the First Select Committee on Homeland Security, which created the Department of Homeland Security, General Counsel to the Select Committee to investigate the voting irregularities of August 2, 2007, and Assistant Parliamentarian to the 2008, 2012, and 2016 Republican National Conventions.

A native of Hollidaysburg, PA, Halpern received bachelor's and master's degrees in Political Science from American University in 1991 and 1992, respectively. He also received a law degree from George Mason University in 1997. Halpern has been included in Roll Call's list of 50 most powerful Congressional staffers 14 times and featured in a National Journal profile as one of "The New Power Players" on Capitol Hill.



THE HONORABLE HUGH NATHANIAL HALPERN
Director
United States Government Publishing Office

**Prepared Statement before the
Subcommittee on Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives**

**United States Government Publishing Office
FY 2026 Budget Hearing**

April 9, 2025
9:00 AM
Room 2359
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

732 North Capitol Street, NW | Washington, DC 20401-0001

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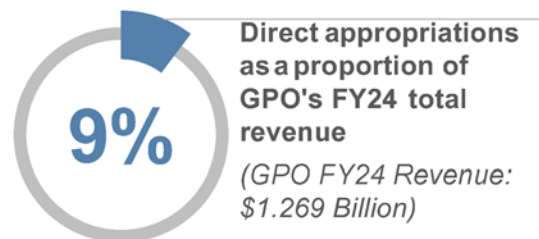
Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to appear before the Subcommittee on Legislative Branch Appropriations to present the Government Publishing Office's (GPO's) fiscal year 2026 appropriations request. Thank you for your past support of GPO, and I look forward to working closely with you and your staff again in the coming year.

I am requesting appropriations of \$135,377,000 for fiscal year 2026, an increase of \$3,378,000 over our FY 2025 appropriation.

This request incorporates increased labor and material costs while accommodating certain initiatives of importance to Congress and the rest of the legislative branch. Our FY 2026 request represents a 2.6 percent increase over FY 2025. It is also 8.2 percent lower than the Agency's all-time high appropriation of \$147.5 million in FY 2010.

GPO operates as a business enterprise, and directly appropriated funds represent only about nine percent of GPO's revenue. In FY 2024, the remainder of our nearly \$1.3 billion in revenue came from GPO's billings to its other Federal customers, such as the Department of State, the National Archives and Records Administration, the Department of Defense, and countless others (*See figure 1*).

Figure 1



Those customers pay for products with pricing based on GPO's statutory requirement to recover its costs, meaning that we adjust pricing based on the cost of materials, labor, and overhead. As most of GPO's appropriations requests are based on funding for Congress' publishing needs and the Agency's operation of the Federal Depository Library Program, we have also had to increase our appropriations requests when faced with increased costs.

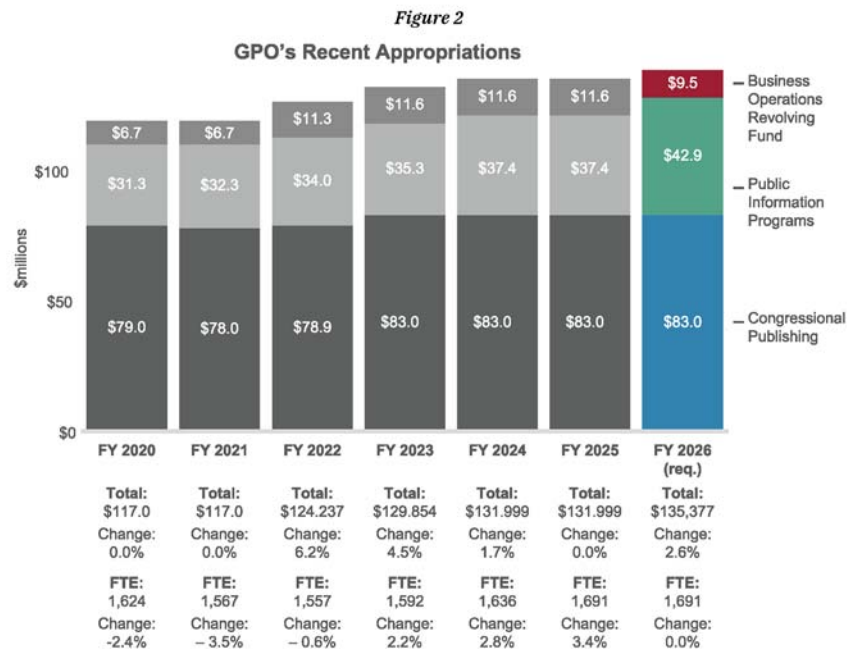
Our model continues to deliver results. For the 28th consecutive year, GPO received an unmodified, or "clean," opinion on its financial statements, showing that we closed our books for fiscal year 2024 with a net positive income of \$57.5 million. That is our fourth consecutive positive result and will enable us to continue investing in our team, equipment, and campus. It is also important to note that, given the conditions with our customers and increased materials costs, I expect our net income to be lower in FY 2025, though still positive.



GPO'S FY 2026 APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST

GPO requests a total FY 2026 appropriation of \$135,377,000, a \$3,378,000 over our FY 2025 appropriation. This increase will account for changes in our labor and raw materials costs and fund ongoing projects important to our congressional customers.

Increased productivity through adopting new technologies has been key to keeping GPO's appropriations needs down, providing new and improved services at lower costs, and reducing overall headcounts. *Figure 2* shows GPO's recent appropriations amounts and requests. Currently, we have 1,644 GPO teammates, compared to 2,284 in FY 2010 when GPO's direct appropriations were 8.2 percent higher.



We prefer repurposing prior-year unexpended balances to keep our appropriations requests as low as possible. We appreciate the willingness of this Subcommittee and the Full Committee to allow GPO to use those balances in support of programs and capital investments that benefit the original purpose of the appropriated funds.

However, as I have mentioned previously, those balances are declining, forcing GPO to request additional funds to continue our current pace of development and innovation.



Our FY 2026 request includes \$83,000,000 for congressional publishing, the same amount as our FY 2025 appropriation. It is based on our estimate of Congress' likely needs, informed by historical trends and available unexpended balances, and includes increased raw materials and labor costs. In constant-dollar terms, it represents a 38 percent reduction since FY 2010.

Our request for the public information programs (PIP) account, through which we administer the nationwide Federal Depository Library Program, is \$42,852,000. This represents an increase of \$5,464,000—or 14.6 percent—over FY 2025 and will cover the costs of providing Federal Government publications in digital and tangible formats to 1,100 Federal depository libraries nationwide, cataloging and indexing, and distributing documents to recipients designated by law and international exchanges. Rising labor and materials costs drive this increase in our FY 2026 PIP appropriation request. With this proposed increase, the PIP appropriation will be just 4.74 percent higher than the amount appropriated in FY 2010 but still 27 percent lower in constant-dollar terms.

The final component of our overall appropriations request is for a total of \$9,525,000 for GPO's revolving fund to support capital investments and information technology upgrades, which is \$2,086,000 less than the amounts appropriated in FY 2025.

This component of our request is critical to ensuring that GPO can make the capital investments in equipment and technology needed to continue providing Congress and our Federal agency customers with the high level of service they expect. It will support two specific longstanding priority capital investment projects listed below that will be familiar to the Subcommittee.

► XPub

First, in FY 2026 we seek \$4,075,000 in direct appropriations support for our continued development of the XPub composition system, which is intended to fully replace our more than 40-year-old proprietary MicroComp composition system.

XPub is a transformational project for GPO. It will enable GPO and our customers to move to an all XML-composition workflow, simplifying authoring and production while also providing data in a format where it can easily be posted on the web, delivered to mobile devices, and repurposed into e-books, mobile web applications, or other forms of content delivery which contribute to openness and transparency in Government.

XPub is being deployed on a product-by-product basis. In FY 2019, GPO took a major step forward by publishing the 2018 Main Edition of the United States Code, a nearly 60,000-page publication, through XPub. Since then, GPO has continued to work on bringing additional publications into XPub production, with a focus on congressional bills, resolutions, amendments, public laws, Statutes at Large, House and Senate calendars, the Congressional Record, and the Federal Register.

In FY 2022, GPO obtained the internal authority to operate for the production release of congressional bills and public laws, which is currently in testing with our House and Senate customers. Its features include integrating House and Senate XML authoring tools for bills and a new responsive HTML format for displaying congressional bills and public laws once fully deployed.



Much of the initial development of XPub had been funded through the annual reprogramming of unexpended appropriations with the Subcommittee's support, but given GPO's mostly static appropriations requests in recent years, those prior-year funds have been largely expended. We appreciate the Subcommittee's support for more than \$21 million in direct appropriations for this project since FY 2022.

If approved, our \$4,075,000 appropriation request will keep XPub development and deployment on track in FY 2026. Once development is complete, we hope to provide XPub to our customers as a software-as-a-service (SAAS) application, ensuring that there is a dedicated stream of income to support the continued development of the platform without the need for separate recurring appropriations.

► GovInfo

The second component of GPO's request for increased capital investment appropriations in FY 2026 relates to the continued development of our peerless GovInfo online portal, the only ISO-certified trusted digital repository in the U.S. In recent years, the Subcommittee directly appropriated funds to refresh GovInfo's infrastructure and further develop its content collections. This year's request of \$5,450,000 for GovInfo is the same amount the Subcommittee provided in FY 2025, and it would be divided between infrastructure investments (\$1,800,000) and development investments (\$3,650,000), including development required to support the digitization of historical content.

Investments in GovInfo support the distribution of much of the legislative data that supports the Library of Congress' Congress.gov site and the bulk data made available for other public uses. In addition, GovInfo helps keep the costs of administering the Federal Depository Library Program down by making hundreds of thousands of critical Government publications available online free of charge, obviating the need to print and distribute thousands of volumes annually.

With the Subcommittee's sustained support, GPO has been able to add hundreds of thousands of additional documents and publications to the GovInfo online repository each year—over 260 thousand content packages in FY 2024—and the public's usage of GovInfo continues to grow, with nearly 142 million information retrievals a month from GovInfo throughout FY 2024.

OIG REQUEST

Lastly, before I conclude, I want to add that, as required by section 1604(c) of the Legislative Branch Inspectors General Independence Act, we have forwarded our Inspector General's request for \$7,708,000 in budget authority for FY 2026 as part of our FY 2026 Budget Submission. Currently, that request is funded as part of GPO's agency overhead—a component of the prices and rates GPO charges its agency customers and Congress—and not as a separate appropriation.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to present GPO's FY 2026 appropriations request, and for all the support you and your staff have extended to us during these challenging past two years. This completes my prepared statement, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Halpern.
And I now recognize Director Swagel for your summary of your written testimony.

STATEMENT OF PHILLIP L. SWAGEL

Mr. SWAGEL. Thank you, Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to present the Congressional Budget Office's budget request. And let me start also by thanking you for your continued support.

CBO requests an appropriation of \$75.8 million for fiscal year 2026. That is an increase of \$5.8 million, or 8.2 percent, from the amount provided in 2025 and in 2024. The request would address increased costs for pay and benefits, allow CBO to improve its IT infrastructure, and enable us to add staff in areas of especially intense legislative interest.

CBO's mission is to provide nonpartisan analysis to the Congress that is timely, rigorous, and transparent. When legislation is heading to a vote, we provide cost estimates and real-time analysis of amendments, sometimes hundreds or even thousands of them, for bills such as the NDAA. We provide analysis and technical assistance for legislation, such as we are doing now with reconciliation.

We produce budget and economic projections that incorporate the effects of recent legislation, recent economic developments, and administrative actions. As an example, with tariffs, we are analyzing those changes and looking to provide Congress with information on the budgetary effects and the economic effects.

And we provide analysis of a broad range of policy issues confronting the Congress, bringing to bear data and research from a variety of sources, including experts suggested by Members, for which we are grateful.

With continued strong interest in our work, additional resources that we are requesting would enable CBO to do even better on both responsiveness and transparency.

In 2025, CBO will maintain its staffing of 270 employees and focus on the highest-priority efforts of cost estimates, technical assistance for legislation, and analyzing the economy and budget effects of proposed policies. We are reducing expenditures elsewhere this year. We are deferring some hiring and waiting on some longer-term improvements in our IT infrastructure.

For 2026, for next year, a little more than half of our requested increase, about \$3 million, would cover increases in current employees' salaries and benefits and allow CBO to expand in key areas of congressional interest.

The full request would allow CBO to add 15 employees, to go to 285, and I would add analysts in the areas of especially strong congressional interest. I would start with healthcare, with macro and dynamic analysis, with national security, and homeland security, including analysis of immigration.

The remaining 48 percent of CBO's increase, about \$2.8 million, would address the increased cost to enhance our cybersecurity and IT infrastructure, including some of the projects that are now on hold.

CBO's requested budget would support our goal to provide budgetary and economic information when it is most useful to the Congress. We will support the Appropriations Committee by providing real-time, provision-by-provision estimates of the 12 annual appropriations bills and of any supplemental appropriations bills or continuing resolutions.

We will also respond to thousands of requests for technical assistance and preliminary estimates, often on quick turnarounds, as committees craft legislation.

We will provide hundreds of cost estimates for legislation, as required by statute, and provide those cost estimates before a floor vote for nearly all bills.

We will publish dozens of statutory and requested reports covering a wide range of topics. Some recent ones are opioids, Navy shipbuilding, immigration, much more.

And we will offer help by phone, by video call, by email, and in person to Member offices, to you and your staff, as you consider and draft legislation or in response to questions about an estimate or a report. We are here to support you.

In summary, to achieve our goal of being as responsive as possible, CBO requests an increase of \$5.8 million. With your support, I look forward to continuing to provide timely and high-quality information to the Congress.

Thank you very much, and I am happy to answer questions.

[The information follows:]

Phillip Swagel became the 10th Director of the Congressional Budget Office on June 3, 2019. Previously, he was a professor at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy and a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and the Milken Institute. He has also taught at Northwestern University, the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, and Georgetown University. His research has involved financial market reform, international trade policy, and China's role in the global economy.

From 2006 to 2009, Dr. Swagel was Assistant Secretary for Economic Policy at the Treasury Department, where he was responsible for analysis of a wide range of economic issues, including policies relating to the financial crisis and the Troubled Asset Relief Program. He has also served as chief of staff and senior economist at the Council of Economic Advisers in the White House and as an economist at the Federal Reserve Board and the International Monetary Fund. He earned his Ph.D. in economics from Harvard University and his A.B. in economics from Princeton University.



Congressional Budget Office
Nonpartisan Analysis for the U.S. Congress



TESTIMONY

The Congressional Budget Office's Request for Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2026

Phillip L. Swagel
Director

Before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

APRIL 9 | 2025

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Congressional Budget Office's budget request.¹ CBO requests appropriations of \$75.8 million for fiscal year 2026. Most of that amount—86.6 percent—would be for pay and benefits; 9.8 percent would be for information technology (IT); and 3.6 percent would be for training, expert consultant services, office supplies, and other items. The requested amount is an increase of \$5.8 million, or 8.2 percent, above the funding provided for this year.

Of the increase, 52 percent would primarily cover increases in current employees' salaries and benefits and would enable CBO to expand its staff in key areas of Congressional interest. The remaining 48 percent would address increased costs to enhance the agency's cybersecurity and IT infrastructure; such improvements are critical to protecting sensitive data and improving the agency's computing power for analyzing complex data sets. CBO is prioritizing advancements in a security strategy called zero trust architecture, which requires verification before allowing access to any user or device.

The requested budget is based on continued strong interest in CBO's work from the Congressional leadership, committees, and Members. In 2024, CBO published about 1,100 cost estimates for legislation and devoted significant resources to analyzing the Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement and National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 (Public Law 118-159); the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-42); the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-47); and H.R. 8467, the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024. For those bills and many others, the agency also fulfilled thousands of requests for technical assistance. In addition, CBO prepared dozens of reports, many at the request of Chairs or Ranking Members of Congressional committees.

CBO will provide many estimates and a large amount of technical assistance to the 119th Congress as lawmakers consider significant legislative initiatives. With additional resources, the agency could provide even more. Under the funding provided for this year, CBO will maintain its staffing at about 270 employees and focus on the highest priority current needs, including preparing cost

estimates, providing technical assistance as the Congress crafts legislation, and analyzing the economic and dynamic budgetary effects of proposed policies. CBO will reduce expenditures elsewhere, by deferring hiring for some positions and deferring some activities, including not undertaking some longer-term improvements in its IT infrastructure.

The fiscal year 2026 request would allow CBO to grow to 285 employees. That number would allow the agency to better meet its responsibilities under the Congressional Budget Act. The request also would allow for IT enhancements, including some currently on hold.

Of the 15 additional staff members CBO would hire in 2026:

- 9 would improve CBO's capabilities to provide timely analysis of changes to health care programs, border security, credit programs (like student loans), and the U.S. population (particularly because of changes in immigration) and of dynamic policy effects (that is, determining how changes in fiscal policies would affect the economy and how those economic changes would, in turn, affect the federal budget);
- 2 would enhance CBO's responsiveness in producing cost estimates and providing technical assistance in the legislative process;
- 1 would be an addition to the agency's editing staff to enhance the readability and accessibility of CBO's materials;
- 1 would provide increased legal assistance;
- 1 would enhance CBO's IT security; and
- 1 would boost outreach to Congressional staff and the press.

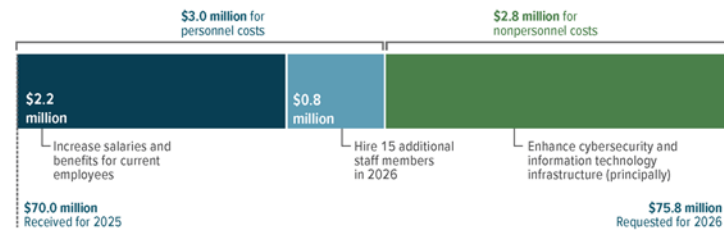
CBO plans to use expert consultants more than it has in the past—enabling the agency to shift to the Congress's key areas of focus more easily and to be more nimble in conducting facility management, work in IT, and financial management.

CBO's Budget Request and Its Consequences for Staffing and Output

In fiscal year 2026, CBO will continue its mission of providing objective, insightful, clearly presented, and timely budgetary and economic information to the

1. See Congressional Budget Office, *The Congressional Budget Office's Request for Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2026* (April 2025), www.cbo.gov/publication/61161.

Figure 1.

Components of CBO's Requested \$5.8 Million Increase

Data source: Congressional Budget Office.

Congress. The \$75.8 million requested would be used mostly for salaries and benefits.

Funding Request for Personnel Costs and Consequences for Staffing

CBO requests \$65.6 million for salaries and benefits to support 285 employees by the end of fiscal year 2026, which equates to 278 full-time-equivalent positions for the year. That amount represents an increase in personnel costs of \$3.0 million, or 4.7 percent, from the \$62.6 million devoted to such costs in fiscal year 2025.

Of the total requested amount:

- \$47.4 million would cover salaries—an increase of \$2.3 million, or 5.2 percent, from the amount provided in 2025. That increase would primarily fund inflation adjustments and performance-based salary increases for current staff in 2026. Employees earning less than \$100,000 would receive an across-the-board increase of 3.8 percent, whereas employees earning \$100,000 or more (for whom more of their compensation is based on performance) would receive a 1.8 percent increase. The requested increase would also fund the hiring of 15 new staff members in 2026.
- \$18.2 million would fund benefits—an increase of \$0.6 million, or 3.6 percent, from the amount provided in 2025. The requested increase would cover growth in the cost of federal benefits and would fund benefits for the 15 new staff members in 2026.

All told, salaries and benefits for current employees would rise by \$2.2 million, and the costs of salaries and

benefits for the 15 additional employees would total \$0.8 million.

Funding Request for Nonpersonnel Costs

CBO requests \$10.1 million for nonpersonnel costs. That request is an increase of \$2.8 million, or 37.8 percent, from the amount provided in 2025. The requested nonpersonnel funds would cover IT operations—such as cybersecurity, software and hardware maintenance, software development, communications, and purchases of commercial data and equipment—and would pay for training, expert consultant services, office supplies, travel, interagency agreements, facilities support, editorial support, financial management operations (including auditing of the agency's financial statements), subscriptions to library services, and other items.

The requested increase would, among other things, allow CBO to improve its ability to detect, assess, and recover from cyberattacks and to expand its cloud infrastructure. Much of the agency's spending on cybersecurity is the cost of maintaining access to data that are essential to CBO's analyses.

Consequences for Output

The requested funding would allow CBO to produce more analysis for the Congress, including analysis in areas in which the agency anticipates additional legislative activity and oversight. It would also allow CBO to provide more technical assistance to committees and Members when they are crafting legislation and faster turnarounds when demand surges. In addition to providing major analytic products and assistance, CBO would

Table 1.

Products by the Congressional Budget Office, Calendar Years 2024 to 2026

Type of product	2024, actual	2025, estimate	2026, estimate
Fulfilled Requests for Technical Assistance. Such requests typically come from committees and Members of Congress seeking a clear picture of the budgetary effects of proposals before they introduce or formally consider legislation.	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands
Cost Estimates for Authorizing Bills. CBO is required by law to produce a cost estimate for nearly every bill that is approved by a full committee of either the House or the Senate. The agency also publishes cost estimates at other stages of the legislative process if requested to do so by a relevant committee or by the Congressional leadership. In addition, CBO reviews bills scheduled to be considered under suspension of rules in the House.	1,079	900	900
Cost Estimates for Appropriation Bills. Those tabulations include account-level estimates for individual appropriation acts at all stages of the legislative process, as well as summary tables showing the status of discretionary appropriations (by appropriations subcommittee) and running totals on a year-to-date basis.	100	100	100
Reports, Working Papers, Testimonies, Slide Decks, Interactive Tools, and Infographics. CBO's publications are generally required by law, prepared in response to requests from the Chairs and Ranking Members of key committees, or aimed at enhancing the transparency of the agency's work. They examine the outlook for the budget and the economy, major issues affecting that outlook under current law, the budgetary effects of policy proposals that could change that outlook, the details of the federal budget process, and a broad range of related budgetary and economic topics in such areas as health care, defense policy, Social Security, and climate change.	103	100	100

Data source: Congressional Budget Office.

continue to produce other important material, such as presentations about the agency's work, letters in response to Members' questions, and blog posts.

CBO regularly consults with committees and the Congressional leadership to ensure that the agency's resources are focused on the work that is of highest priority to the Congress. The demands on the agency remain intense and strain its resources in many areas. Even with high productivity by a dedicated staff, CBO will not be able to produce as many estimates and other analyses as committees, the leadership, and individual Members request.

Requested Information and Authorities

In this section, CBO provides information about its challenges in accessing federal data and requests the authority to provide a childcare benefit.

CBO's Access to Data

The House Committee on Appropriations directed CBO to report to the committees of jurisdiction any challenges in accessing federal data and to identify whether the

Congress can take any actions to ensure continuous and real-time access.

CBO obtains from federal agencies a wide array of information, which it uses to produce baseline budget projections, economic projections, cost estimates, and reports. The agency works collaboratively with agencies to obtain the needed data through formal and informal means. The Congressional Budget Act provides CBO general authority to access data from a variety of sources. CBO also accesses data by using legal authorities applicable to specific types of data, such as federal tax information. CBO currently has more than 20 active data-use agreements with other federal agencies.

During the fall of 2024, two laws were enacted to improve CBO's access to data:

- The Congressional Budget Office Data Sharing Act (P.L. 118-89) clarifies and strengthens CBO's general authority for accessing executive branch data under the Congressional Budget Act.
- The Congressional Budget Office Data Access Act (P.L. 118-104) authorizes agencies to disclose to CBO information that is protected by the Privacy Act's

confidentiality requirements, providing CBO the same access to that information as the Government Accountability Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation have.

Enactment of the Congressional Budget Office Data Sharing Act, which amends the Congressional Budget Act, highlights CBO's need for resources to maintain strong IT security measures. Because of the sensitive nature of the data the amendment provides access to, CBO needs to provide the same level of confidentiality as the law requires of the agency that provides the data. In addition, the legislation requires CBO to provide to the Congress within one year of enactment a report listing any formal requests for information made to executive branch agencies and any challenges faced.

CBO has identified other actions (previously mentioned in the fiscal year 2025 budget request) that the Congress can take to improve the agency's access to information:

- **Restoring access to student aid data.** CBO has lost access to information that is an important component of the agency's models of the Federal Pell Grant Program and student loan programs. A change to section 6103 of the Internal Revenue Code would restore that access.

For many years, CBO received from the Department of Education data on the income of Pell grant and student loan recipients. In the summer of 2024, the department began receiving certain information about the income of student loan borrowers directly from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), newly making the data federal tax information (FTI) that CBO lacks statutory authority to access. CBO is seeking an amendment to section 6103 of the Internal Revenue Code to allow the agency to again receive those data. CBO receives FTI under section 6103 for other purposes and is compliant with the IRS's security requirements.

The Department of Education's change in practice has not yet affected CBO's analyses because there is a lag between the department's collection of the information during an award year and transmittal to CBO. At some point, however, the change in practice will significantly diminish CBO's capability to analyze those student aid programs.

CBO has been working with the Joint Committee on Taxation and the Education and Treasury

Departments, as well as with several Congressional committees (the House Committee on Ways and Means; the House Committee on Education and Workforce; the Senate Committee on Finance; the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions; and the House and Senate Budget Committees) regarding an amendment.

- **Allowing CBO to receive gifts.** CBO is seeking authority for fiscal year 2026 (and would renew its request for subsequent years) to accept gifts of property, including money and intangible property, or services to support the operation of the agency. Under current law, CBO often can obtain new data sets, services, and tools from private entities by procuring them using appropriated funds or negotiating no-cost contracts compliant with federal requirements. Gift authority would enable CBO to sometimes obtain such data and tools more quickly or without expense. CBO would include in its annual budget justification a description of any gifts accepted, the source of the gifts, and a description of the benefits to the taxpayers.

As the interests of the Congress change, CBO must develop the capacity to analyze new issues and policies. Consequently, the agency will need to obtain new sources of information and might require new specific authorities to do so. CBO will work with the committees of jurisdiction as new challenges arise.

Requested Authority for a Childcare Benefit

CBO renews its request for the following authority to provide a childcare benefit:

Sec. ____ The Director of the Congressional Budget Office may expend funds appropriated in fiscal year 2026 and each fiscal year thereafter to reimburse employees of the Office for costs to improve the affordability of childcare if the Director determines that reimbursing such expenses is of sufficient benefit or value to the Office.

The Congressional Budget Act states that CBO employees shall have the same employment benefits and privileges as employees of the House of Representatives. Childcare is one of those benefits. Gaining access to the House of Representatives Childcare Center (HRCCLC) is challenging for CBO staff members because they are given lower priority than employees of the House. That ranking stems from the statute that provides the House's childcare authority [2 U.S.C. § 2062(a)(1)]. As a result,

it is generally not possible for CBO employees to enroll their children in the HRCCC at the youngest ages, for which childcare is most needed. CBO staff are also given lower priority than Senate employees to access the Senate Employees Childcare Center. Those difficulties mean CBO employees cannot take advantage of the House and Senate centers, which offer high-quality childcare near their workplace and which can charge lower rates partly because they occupy government-provided space.

Included in CBO's fiscal year 2026 budget request is \$250,000 for the cost of those payments (embedded in various object classes for benefits). This benefit would enhance CBO's ability to recruit and retain a talented and competitive workforce.

Strengthening Responsiveness

CBO seeks to provide information when it is most useful to the Congress. Depending on its purpose, that information takes a variety of forms, such as cost estimates, background information, and technical assistance. In almost all cases, CBO completes a cost estimate before legislation comes to a floor vote. In addition, the agency works to provide technical assistance, reports, and other information to lawmakers and their staff during earlier stages of the legislative process.

Beginning in fiscal year 2019, CBO initiated a multiyear effort to strengthen its responsiveness to the Congress. To carry out that plan, CBO received additional resources to expand staffing in high-demand areas, such as health care and immigration. It has increased its use of assistant analysts, who can move from one topic to another to support more senior analysts when demand surges for analysis of a particular topic or when additional assistance is needed for a complicated estimate. In addition, CBO continues to engage expert consultants in complex areas, such as health policy, agricultural and nutrition programs, economic forecasting, and climate-related research. Finally, the agency is continuing to expand its use of team approaches for large and complicated projects. That approach has been particularly effective in enabling CBO to produce timely analyses of legislation involving health care.

CBO's goal is to increase the number of staff with overlapping skills within and across teams. In some cases, those skills will consist of expertise related to particular topics, such as defense or energy. In other cases, they will be technical, such as the ability to design and improve

simulation models. In a similar vein, CBO plans to invest additional resources in bolstering analysts' ability to coordinate work that requires expertise from across the agency. Another objective is to give additional senior analysts responsibility for projects that span multiple subject areas.

The budgetary increase that CBO is requesting would allow it to increase its efforts to be responsive. In 2026, CBO plans to hire additional staff to conduct more analysis of changes to health care programs, border security, credit programs (like student loans), and the U.S. population (particularly because of changes in immigration) and of dynamic policy effects (that is, determining how changes in fiscal policies would affect the economy and how those economic changes would, in turn, affect the budget)—areas in which CBO expects the Congress to have increased interest. It also plans to hire additional staff to produce more timely cost estimates and fulfill more Congressional requests for technical assistance, particularly in the areas that involve complicated modeling.

Enhancing Transparency

CBO works hard to make its analysis transparent and plans to strengthen those efforts, building on the increased emphasis that it has placed on the endeavor over the past several years. In 2025 and 2026, many of CBO's employees will spend part of their time on making the agency's analyses more transparent.

Testifying and Publishing Answers to Questions

In 2025 and 2026, CBO expects to testify about its baseline projections and other topics in response to requests by the Congress. That work will involve presenting oral remarks, answering questions at hearings, and presenting written statements, as well as publishing answers to Members' questions for the record. CBO will continue to address issues raised as part of the oversight provided by the House and Senate Budget Committees and the Congress generally.

Explaining Analytical Methods

CBO plans to publish material providing general information to help Members of Congress, their staff, and others better understand its work, including its general approach and particular applications of its methods. For example, a report will explain the agency's approach to modeling the effects of import tariffs and carbon border adjustments on trade in energy-intensive goods. Working papers, too, will provide such explanations for various

topics, and in some cases, CBO will be able to publish the computer code used in models. In addition, most cost estimates will include a section describing the basis of the estimate.

Releasing Data

In 2025 and 2026, CBO will maintain its practice of publishing extensive sets of data to accompany its major recurring reports, including detailed information about 10-year budget projections, historical budget outcomes, 10-year projections for federal trust funds, revenue projections by category, spending projections by budget account, tax parameters, effective marginal tax rates on labor and capital, and 10-year projections of economic variables, including the economy's potential (or sustainable) output.

The agency will also provide details about its baseline projections, for example, for the Federal Pell Grant Program, student loan programs, Medicare, military retirement, the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation, Social Security Disability Insurance, Social Security Old-Age and Survivors Insurance, the Social Security trust funds, child nutrition programs, the Child Support Enforcement and Child Support Collections programs, foster care and adoption assistance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, unemployment compensation, the Department of Agriculture's mandatory farm programs, federal programs that guarantee mortgages, programs funded by the Highway Trust Fund, benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and veterans' disability compensation and pensions.

Other data will provide details about long-term budget projections, projections underlying Social Security estimates, more than a thousand expired or expiring authorizations of appropriations, and dozens of federal credit programs. When CBO analyzes the President's budget request, it will post a set of files providing estimates of the budgetary effects of specific proposals. The agency will also continue to post the data underlying various reports' charts and tables.

Analyzing the Accuracy of CBO's Estimates

In 2025 and 2026, CBO will continue to release reports analyzing the accuracy of its projections in comparison with actual outcomes, including a review of the accuracy of its outlay and revenue projections for the previous year, as well as some periodic reviews of the accuracy of

its projections of revenues, outlays, deficits, and debt over time. CBO will also look back at the accuracy of its cost estimates when the necessary data are available.

Comparing Current Estimates With Previous Ones

In several of its recurring publications—reports about the budget and economic outlook, federal subsidies for health insurance, and the long-term budget outlook—CBO will continue to explain the differences between the current year's projections and those produced in the previous year. In its cost estimates, CBO will continue to identify related legislative provisions for which it has provided recent estimates and explain the extent to which the provisions and estimates at hand are similar or different.

Comparing CBO's Estimates With Those of Other Organizations

CBO will compare its budget projections with the Administration's and its economic projections with those of private forecasters and other government agencies when possible. In addition, in various reports, the agency will include comparisons of its estimates with estimates made by other organizations. When time does not allow for publication but interest is great, analysts will discuss such comparisons with Congressional staff.

Estimating the Effects of Policy Alternatives

In 2025 and 2026, to assist policymakers and analysts who may hold differing views about the most useful benchmark for considering possible changes to laws (and to make the consequences of alternative policies more transparent), CBO will estimate the effects that some alternative assumptions about future policies would have on budgetary outcomes.

Characterizing the Uncertainty of Estimates

CBO's budget and economic estimates will continue to aim to be in the middle of a range of likely outcomes under a given set of policies. The agency's reports about the 10-year outlook for the budget and the economy, the long-term outlook for the budget, and federal subsidies for health insurance will contain substantial discussions of the uncertainty of CBO's projections (and the limitations of its analyses) to help policymakers understand the factors that might cause estimates or outcomes to differ in the future. In addition, in most cost estimates in which uncertainty is significant, CBO will include a discussion of the topic.

Creating Data Visualizations

In 2025 and 2026, CBO will provide information about its budget and economic projections in slide decks and create infographics about actual outlays and revenues. The agency will also produce more reports that rely principally on visual presentations.

Conducting Outreach

CBO will continue to communicate regularly with Congressional staff and others outside the agency to explain its findings and methods, respond to questions, and obtain feedback. The agency's Director will meet frequently with Members of Congress to do the same. After each set of baseline projections is published, CBO's staff will meet with Congressional staff to discuss the projections and answer questions.

CBO will continue its practice of routinely consulting with many outside experts who represent a variety of perspectives as it develops cost estimates and other analyses. In addition, CBO's staff will, as usual, give presentations on various topics to Congressional staff and outside experts to gain feedback on the agency's work. Many reports will benefit from outside experts' written comments on preliminary versions. For some recurring reports produced on compressed timetables, such as the one about CBO's long-term budget projections, the agency will solicit comments on previous editions and selected technical issues to incorporate improvements in future editions.

As it does each year, CBO will convene experts on its Panel of Economic Advisers (PEA) and Panel of Health Advisers (PHA), who provide feedback on many topics, including the agency's forecasting methods and models. The agency hosts meetings of the advisers—once a year with its PHA and twice with its PEA—and solicits their views between meetings as well. Congressional staff also attend the meetings. (Lists of the members of those panels and agendas for the meetings can be found on CBO's website.)

The topics discussed at the meetings usually reflect areas of sustained interest by the Congress and help improve CBO's relevant analysis. For example, CBO's September 2021 PHA meeting included a session on telehealth, an area for which CBO was working to improve its modeling capabilities so it could better estimate the effects of applicable legislation. To take another example, CBO's September 2024 PHA meeting included sessions on

new medical technology and the long-term effects of preventive health care, with the goal of improving and enhancing the agency's analysis of genetic testing for early detection of cancer, hepatitis-C, sickle-cell disease, and obesity—all topics on which CBO has recently published analyses in response to Congressional requests.

Similarly, meetings of the PEA cover areas of intense Congressional focus as well as CBO's pending economic forecast. For example, central to the discussion at CBO's November 2024 meeting were the budgetary and economic effects of the expiring provisions of the 2017 tax act—an area in which CBO continues to improve and refine its analysis.

In 2026, CBO will spend about \$33,000 on its PHA, similar to the amount it spent in 2024 and plans to spend in 2025. That amount provides for a small honorarium for members and costs associated with hosting a meeting at CBO. CBO plans to spend about \$59,000 on its PEA in 2026 to cover the costs of honoraria and two meetings.

CBO's staff will give presentations on Capitol Hill on CBO's budget and economic projections and on other topics. In those presentations, CBO will explain its work and answer questions. The agency will also give presentations about its findings and about work in progress in a variety of venues to offer explanations and gather feedback. It will also use blog posts to summarize and highlight various issues. In addition, it will work to answer questions from the press in a timely fashion and connect members of the media with CBO's products as they are published.

Finally, to keep the Congress informed of its work, CBO will continue its practice of sending emails to interested staff notifying them about recently released reports and cost estimates. The agency will also continue publishing a quarterly newsletter, *CBO's Quarter in Review*, which is a roundup of the agency's most recent publications and cost estimates. The newsletter is a companion to quarterly reports listing recent publications and work in progress, which may include reports, working papers, testimonies, interactive tools, infographics, and cost estimates.

This testimony summarizes information in the Congressional Budget Office's budget request for fiscal year 2026. That budget request was prepared by Leigh Angres, Tracy L. Henry, Joyce Shin, and Kamna Virmani (formerly of CBO) with assistance from Dana Ealey, Kevin Laden, and Damon Whitley and with guidance from Mark Smith. It is available at www.cbo.gov/publication/61161.

Mark Hadley reviewed the testimony. John Skeen edited it, and Jorge Salazar created the graphics and prepared the text for publication. The testimony is available at www.cbo.gov/publication/61287.

CBO seeks feedback to make its work as useful as possible. Please send comments to communications@cbo.gov.



Phillip L. Swagel
Director



Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Swagel.

For questions, I will call on members based on the seniority of those present when the hearing was called to order, alternating between majority and minority, and then we will call on members in order of their arrival. Each will have 5 minutes.

And I now recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Mr. Dodaro, on March 6, GAO responded to a request from Senators Whitehouse, Schiff, and Padilla with a letter titled "Observations Regarding the Environmental Protection Agency's Submission of Notices of Decision on Clear Air Act Preemption Waivers as Rules Under the Congressional Review Act."

The letter made legal observations on whether the Biden administration's action to grant waivers to California under the Clean Air Act allowing them to ban the sale of internal-combustion-engine vehicles was subject to a motion of disapproval under the Congressional Review Act.

While the CRA does not grant the authority to the Comptroller General or the GAO to make determinations, Congress does ask the GAO to weigh in when an agency has failed to send a rule or potential rule over to Congress. This is to ensure that the administrative rules and actions cannot get around the congressional review by simply refusing to send them to Congress.

When a rule is sent, GAO has no further part to play in the CRA process. In fact, GAO has directly stated that, beyond weighing in, when an agency fails to submit a rule, as long as Congress is not deprived of exercising its powers under CRA, there is no impediment to those powers that a GAO opinion might cure. And, in those instances, GAO has instead chosen to take no opinion.

On February 20, the EPA sent over three Clean Air Act waivers as rulings to Congress for review. As GAO has stated previously, under the Administrative Procedure Act, which the CRA follows, Congress has the authority to review any actions that an agency submits for that purpose, which is why it is very concerning to me that, in a matter of 8 business days, in a seemingly partisan and political move, GAO issued observations that the EPA waivers which have already been submitted to Congress for review were not rulings and, therefore, not subject to CRA.

Can you point to one other example where GAO told Congress that a rule submitted by the executive branch for congressional review isn't eligible under the CRA?

Mr. DODARO. Yeah. I will be happy to do that for the record.

In that case, first I would say, this clearly, I can say without equivocation, was not a partisan issue.

We also have responsibilities to respond for legal opinions from Members of Congress—

Mr. VALADAO. So—

Mr. DODARO [continuing]. Outside of the CRA issue.

The reason it was done quickly is, all we were asked to do is to explain our prior decisions, which basically said that orders are not subject to the CRA provision. So all we did was provide clarification of something we had already done.

Mr. VALADAO. So it was a pretty clear question, though. Can you point to one other example where GAO told Congress that a rule

submitted by the executive branch for Congressional Review Act isn't eligible for review under the CRA?

Mr. DODARO. All right. General Counsel informs me we have no other examples.

Mr. VALADAO. Does the GAO have the authority to tell Congress a rule submitted by the administration for congressional review is ineligible for said review?

Mr. DODARO. That decision is done by the Parliamentarian. We don't make those decisions.

Mr. VALADAO. Okay. So the GAO does not have that authority.

Your letter stated, "In this case, we"—the GAO—"are presented with a different situation because the actions were submitted as rules under the CRA, and it is not one in which we normally issue a legal decision."

After that very clear statement, GAO then went on to provide 10 pages of legal observations.

Why did you break with your regular practice and weigh in on something that is completely counter to historical precedent?

Mr. DODARO. Because we were asked by three Members of Congress to provide our legal views on our prior legal decisions, something we do all the time.

Mr. VALADAO. This letter was pushed out remarkably fast. And given that it is inconsistent with normal GAO precedent, it appears to be politically motivated. Can you tell me why the GAO responded to this request with such speed?

Mr. DODARO. We were asked to respond. We had already issued the opinion, and—

Mr. VALADAO. Can we expect all further reviews to take 8 days? Is that the new precedent, the new speed that your department will be acting—

Mr. DODARO. If we are asked to provide a summary of our prior decisions, yes.

Mr. VALADAO. So 8 days is the new standard.

Mr. DODARO. For those we are asked to provide summaries of our prior decisions.

Mr. VALADAO. All right.

I know others want to talk about this as well, and my time is about expired, but thank you.

And I will now call on Mr. Espaillat for his 5 minutes.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Swagel, we are living in a cost-of-living crisis with great economic uncertainty, and the families that I represent are afraid of what will come next. The President's reckless tariffs against our neighbors and allies have presented this uncertainty, and the markets really continue to tumble, as early as this morning.

You wrote in December that higher tariffs will increase Federal receipts, but in your letter you also explained the negative effects on the economy of higher tariffs. Those economic effects are what really matter to the people that I represent.

Though there is a very high degree of uncertainty surrounding the administration's recent announcements, I would like you to give us a nonpartisan, expert opinion on what you should expect.

The question is: Under President Trump's tariff policy, should we expect the price of consumer and capital goods to be more expensive or less expensive?

Mr. SWAGEL. Oh, okay. Thank you, sir.

Yes. We are analyzing the tariff announcements. And to directly answer the question, the price of consumer goods, the things bought by families, by households, and the prices paid by businesses will go up. The tariffs will reduce the efficiency of the economy, lead to lower incomes.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. And so what does that mean in real terms for someone that wants to purchase a television, go to the supermarket and buy food? What does that mean to the American public that often is living on fixed income or, you know, having a hard time making ends meet?

Mr. SWAGEL. Right. The prices of the things that families buy will rise, and family incomes will go less far. And then businesses will see the prices of their inputs go up, and that will reduce—tend to reduce business investment. That will reduce hiring and reduce the strength of the economy.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. So this is really reckless. And it is manifested every day as the markets continue to tumble.

And the kind of increase that you are asking for will lead us to get additional staffing so that we can make this kind of impartial, nonpartisan analysis on the economy, correct?

Mr. SWAGEL. That is correct. The additional staff would help us do this kind of analysis.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. And you are asking for 15 additional staffers, right?

Mr. SWAGEL. That is correct.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. And another question that I had regarding that—because I know that one of the areas where you have expressed a keen interest in is the health arena, right?

Mr. SWAGEL. Uh-huh.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. And health in many ways is also part of the economy, because the cost of healthcare is so high that it impacts on real pocketbook issues.

And so I want to know, like, as we move forward and this tariff war continues to wreck our economy and we continue to see an effort to potentially cut Medicaid and Medicare from the American people, two vital programs, really life-and-death issues—because if I have Medicaid and all of a sudden my benefits are cut, it is a life-and-death decision—do you foresee these 15 new folks doing an analysis on the impact of the cuts to Medicaid and Medicare as it pertains to the potential tax cuts for the very rich?

Mr. SWAGEL. Okay. Yes. The people I would look to add, first and foremost, would be in health. We do analysis of all the programs you mentioned—Medicaid, Medicare, pharma, veterans health—and I would add experts in that, because there is intense congressional interest. And I would—

Mr. ESPAILLAT. And these programs are very costly, right? So it is almost impossible to save money so that you can give a tax break to the very rich without touching these vital programs, like Medicaid, Medicare, and I would dare to say even Social Security?

Mr. SWAGEL. I mean, you have pointed to the elements of the fiscal challenge—the healthcare programs, Social Security, Medicare—and then revenues on the tax side. And those are the decisions Congress would have to make in choosing how to address the fiscal challenge. And we would provide that analysis, including of the tradeoffs that you are pointing to.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. So I would look forward to making sure that you have the additional tools and additional staffing to ensure that we make these kinds of nonpartisan analysis. I think that will guide us in the right direction, as the stewards of our budget and having the constitutional responsibility of the power of the purse to make the right decisions and protect table and pocketbook issues for the American people.

Thank you, Mr. Swagel.

And I yield back.

Mr. SWAGEL. Thank you, sir.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Espailat.

Now I recognize Mr. LaLota for his 5 minutes.

Mr. LALOTA. Good morning, Dr. Swagel. How are you doing? You are going to stay in the hot seat for a few moments.

Mr. SWAGEL. No. Good.

Mr. LALOTA. I hope you don't mind.

Mr. SWAGEL. Of course.

Mr. LALOTA. I appreciate you taking the time to come to my office yesterday, and I want to continue some of the conversation we had yesterday—

Mr. SWAGEL. Uh-huh.

Mr. LALOTA [continuing]. Now here.

You are the Director of the Congressional Budget Office, right?

Mr. SWAGEL. Yes, sir.

Mr. LALOTA. And when you ask ChatGPT what the mission or focus of the Congressional Budget Office is, the AI tool states that “the Congressional Budget Office is a nonpartisan agency that provides Congress with analyses and projections for budget and economic decisions.”

Mr. SWAGEL. Uh-huh.

Mr. LALOTA. “Its main functions are to help Congress understand the fiscal impact of their policies and to provide objective, timely data to inform economic and budgetary decisions.”

Is that a fair summary of your department, sir?

Mr. SWAGEL. No, that is—that is very good.

Mr. LALOTA. Great.

Mr. SWAGEL. Yeah.

Mr. LALOTA. Is it fair to say that a large part of your staff's work is to research, gather information, process that information, evaluate it, and ultimately disseminate it to policymakers here in the Congress?

Mr. SWAGEL. No, that is exactly right. That is our mission—to gather, analyze, and then disseminate.

Mr. LALOTA. And you have a staff of about 270 people to do that?

Mr. SWAGEL. 270, yeah.

Mr. LALOTA. And when your staff is doing their jobs to research and to provide analysis to Congress, do you use artificial intelligence?

Mr. SWAGEL. We do now in some limited ways—some things on the programming side, some things on the, sort of, technical side. The output side, no. That is, in some sense, our reports, our analysis, is our judgment.

So the output side, no. The input side, we will use it in some ways like what you have, to summarize outside information, but in limited ways.

Mr. LALOTA. Is it safe to say that nowadays you are using the AI tool more than you did a year ago, 2 years ago, 5 years ago?

Mr. SWAGEL. Oh, absolutely.

Mr. LALOTA. And what benefits in terms of efficiencies specifically do AI tools provide the CBO?

Mr. SWAGEL. You know, for some things, it is really an incredible benefit. On the programming side, converting from, you know, old code to new code, it is amazing. For summarizing information, it is very useful, and you showed, you know, a perfect example.

You know, sometimes it is not quite as good for complicated issues. And so, you know, we are still a bit wary on it.

Mr. LALOTA. But when you are using it, you are seeking to use it to make work more efficient?

Mr. SWAGEL. I will give you one example. I had a recent meeting with someone, and I wanted to know, well, what is this person's work about. And I didn't do it; one of my staff put, essentially, you know, his web page—it was a "him"—his web page into ChatGPT, and it gave me a page of a summary of what this person did. And it was pretty spot-on.

Mr. LALOTA. Yeah.

Mr. SWAGEL. So that is an example of the efficiency.

Mr. LALOTA. Yeah.

So here is my trouble.

Mr. SWAGEL. Uh-huh.

Mr. LALOTA. You are asking for an 8-percent increase. Pretty sizable. You know, nowadays, a large part of the conversation we are having here, especially on this side of the aisle, is finding efficiencies, reducing costs, cutting spending, providing new programs and procedures to help make things more efficient.

At a time where a department that is inherently research- and process-based has a new tool in AI to avail itself of, at the same time that you are able to gain those efficiencies, you are also asking for 8 percent—not 2 or 3 percent, but 8—in order to build your staff up. And that is a tough thing for us to square up here.

So I guess my question then, Doctor, is: Why does the CBO need more people at a time where there is such a tool out there to make your job more efficient, sir?

Mr. SWAGEL. No, that is—obviously, that is a completely fair question, and, you know, thank you for raising it, you know, yesterday and today.

You know, what I would say is, these new AI tools will help us. They are a support for us. You know, they do add efficiencies. The people we add are experts, and they are the ones doing the analysis.

And so, of an issue that is in front of us, we need the experts who understand what has happened in the past, what the situation

is now, how what the executive branch is doing affects the legislation, and then can do that analysis.

So, in some sense it is, our analysts, our people who are the experts, use these tools, but we need the people.

I can give you an example, but I feel like I have gone on a bit long.

Mr. LALOTA. I appreciate that.

You know, you are in the business of developing reports and recommendations. Looking internally to your 270-person staff, have you done an analysis within yourself to figure out what is the cost-benefit of integrating AI more into your operation?

Because I am still not able to—because of our conversation yesterday and today—and you are being good and honest and deliberate, and I appreciate that—but I am still not able to square why we need more people when you have such a tool out there to create efficiency.

So I guess my question is, can you show us a report looking internally to your 270-person department that harnesses AI and to tell us that, given AI, you might need less people or you might be able to cut costs or provide more efficiencies? Can you provide us a report in due time, Doctor, on that?

Mr. SWAGEL. Oh, absolutely, I can do that. And that is a useful suggestion. Where it will let us do—you know, to save, and then, if I have more resources, where AI won't—you know, I need people, I need resources on top of the AI. I will do that.

Mr. LALOTA. Thanks, Doctor.

I yield, Chairman.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. LaLota.

Now I yield 5 minutes to Mr. Quigley.

Mr. QUIGLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Dodaro, thank you for your service. Good luck.

In the past, you have testified about how the Office of Management and Budget should make legally binding budget decisions—that we call “apportionments”—public. Is that correct?

Mr. DODARO. Yes.

Mr. QUIGLEY. And can you explain briefly the importance of making data about these budget decisions public?

Mr. DODARO. Well, it is very important for us to be able to track that information to ensure that Congress's power of the purse is executed as Congress intended. The apportionments provide that information.

So it is very important for GAO, for our work to make sure the agencies spend all the money that Congress intended them to spend but don't spend more than what they are authorized by the Congress. It provides information to the public and also directly to the Congress to allow it to exercise its oversight responsibilities.

Mr. QUIGLEY. It is transparency in how money is spent.

Mr. DODARO. Absolutely.

Mr. QUIGLEY. In 2022, the FSGG bill, which I helped draft as chair of the subcommittee, required OMB to make apportionments public. We then made it a permanent requirement in 2023.

However, in January of this year, OMB sent this committee a letter saying that they will no longer operate that website.

In the view of the GAO, is the Office of Management and Budget in violation of the statutory mandate right now?

Mr. DODARO. Yes.

Mr. QUIGLEY. Mr. Chair, I ask unanimous consent to submit for the record a letter from the GAO's General Counsel to OMB's Director regarding OMB's action to dismantle the public apportionments website.

Mr. VALADAO. Without objection.

[The information follows:]



U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

441 G St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

April 8, 2025

Russell T. Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget

Dear Mr. Vought,

The purpose of this letter is to address issues that have come to the attention of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) regarding the decision of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to remove the website that made apportionments available publicly. This is very concerning because of the potential implications for review of such records for federal audits, congressional oversight, specifically with regard to Congress's power of the purse.

We understand that OMB took down the website taking the position that it requires the disclosure of predecisional, and deliberative information. We disagree. As apportionments are legally binding decisions on agencies under the Antideficiency Act, we note that such information, by definition, cannot be predecisional or deliberative. See 31 U.S.C. § 1517. OMB also noted that apportionments may contain sensitive information which, if disclosed publicly automatically, may pose a danger to national security and foreign policy. While there may be some information that is sensitive if disclosed publicly, it is certainly not the case that all apportionment data meets that standard. Where there is such sensitive data that should be protected from public disclosure, those would be the exception and should not serve to take down the entire database. We remain committed to engaging with OMB and accommodating situations where sensitive data should not be posted publicly but be made available as required for congressional oversight and federal audits.

Moreover, there is a statutory requirement for OMB to post the apportionment data on a public website. Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Act, 2023. Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-328, §204, div. E, tit. II, 136 Stat. 4667 (Dec. 9, 2022).

As you know, apportionments are a critical part of the legal framework, anchored in the Antideficiency Act, that helps to ensure the responsible use of taxpayer dollars as well as to protect Congress's power of the purse. Apportionments help achieve both of these worthy goals by requiring the President and OMB to apportion, or subdivide, fixed-year appropriations to executive branch agencies. The apportionment system is intended to achieve the effective and orderly use of taxpayer dollars, and assist government officials and employees of the executive branch so that they do

not over-obligate or over-expend them and create the need for supplemental or deficiency appropriations. Where officials or employees obligate or expend in excess of apportionments, they violate the Antideficiency Act, and agencies are required to report such violations to the President, Congress, and GAO.

Apportionment transparency facilitates oversight of federal spending. Because apportionments bind agencies as to both how and when appropriations may be obligated or expended, they provide invaluable insight into agency funding decisions. Apportionments also provide helpful context for GAO examinations of agency compliance with statutes such as the Antideficiency Act and Impoundment Control Act.

GAO has a number of on-going Impoundment Control Act inquiries and engagement work, many of which rely on apportionment data. GAO asks that OMB reinstate this apportionment data, consistent with the law and OMB and GAO's responsibilities to protect any information deemed by OMB to be sensitive. If OMB does not reinstate this apportionment data, please be aware that GAO has a broad statutory right of access to apportionment data under 31 U.S.C. § 716 and will seek such apportionment data accordingly.

As GAO continues its work regarding the Impoundment Control Act and other engagement work, it is essential that we retain access to this apportionment data. Congress and the American taxpayer depend on GAO to carry out Congress's oversight responsibilities, specifically with regard to its power of the purse. I would appreciate your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Edda Emmanuelli Perez
General Counsel

Cc: Mark Paoletta
General Counsel
Office of Management and Budget

Cc: The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Cc: The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Cc: The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chairman
Committee on the Budget
United States Senate

Cc: The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget
United States Senate

Cc: The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Cc: The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Cc: The Honorable Jodey Arrington
Chairman
Budget Committee
House of Representatives

Cc: The Honorable Brendan Boyle
Ranking Member
Budget Committee
House of Representatives

Mr. QUIGLEY. For the record, this letter lays out the GAO's legal opinion that the OMB is in violation of the law for taking down the website that made apportionment decisions available to the public.

This requirement was enacted, for the record, over former President Biden and former OMB Director Young's protestations.

Sir, is there any reason that President Trump and the OMB Director shouldn't be held to the same accountability and transparency?

Mr. DODARO. No. No.

Everybody is for transparency until they are held accountable.

Mr. QUIGLEY. So, to sum up, you all need this information to do your job saving the government money. We need this information to do our jobs to fund the government appropriately. The public needs this information to hold the Federal Government accountable. And OMB is intentionally breaking the law to hide this information.

Thank you, sir.

And I yield back.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Quigley.

I now recognize Mr. Strong for 5 minutes.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would first like to express my gratitude to the witnesses and their staff for their ongoing support and the invaluable resources they provide to Congress and our country.

Dr. Swagel, as I mentioned to you earlier this week, I am a data-driven individual. As Congress prepares to move forward on President Trump's agenda, is it vital that we receive accurate cost estimates for any legislation?

Mr. SWAGEL. Yes, sir. And that is my goal, to get you accurate information.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you.

In 2021, the Biden Rescue Plan was estimated at a 1.9 trillion—million dollar economic stimulus plan. Do you today believe that the so-called stimulus plan only cost the American taxpayers \$1.9 trillion? And what percentage of that package was a total waste?

Mr. SWAGEL. Ah. Well, it is—it is a good question. It is something that we do sometimes go back and look—look at legislation. We haven't had the ability to do that.

And that legislation did, you know, many things. One of the things it did was contribute to the high inflation that started in 2021. It, in a sense, meant that the dollars were spent were less valuable.

And so I am not saying it was a waste, because I haven't looked at that, but it made—in some sense, it hindered itself.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you.

Given the challenges your office has faced in the past, will any of the requested funds be directed toward refining the methodology used for cost estimates, particularly when dealing with a large-scale legislation, to get true and accurate data to Members of Congress?

Mr. SWAGEL. Yes, sir. The people I would add to work on dynamic analysis and on macro would do just that—look at the relationship between legislation and the economy, in both directions.

Mr. STRONG. Mr. Dodaro, I realize that there is a high demand for GAO's services at any given time, with a \$26 trillion debt. How does your fiscal year 2026 budget aim to improve operations and turnaround time for reports to adequately meet the demand?

Mr. DODARO. Yes. This would provide us with the additional people. We estimate we are going to lose about 126 people as a result of the continuing resolution, so this will diminish our ability to provide timely information to the Congress. So our request will ensure that we can provide more timely information to the Congress, that we can give Congress recommendations to make the government more efficient and effective.

You know, we have been engaged with some of the Department of Government Efficiency efforts, and they are actually using our recommendations to help carry out their activities.

So, we are a good investment. GAO pays multiple returns to the Congress.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you.

Pivoting over to you, Director Halpern, how is the GPO adapting its pricing model for other Federal customers, such as the Department of Defense, to ensure it remains financially sustainable?

Mr. HALPERN. Our formula is actually pretty simple. We charge our customers for the cost of the materials and labor.

Most of DOD's work is actually going out to private contractors out in your districts. So we are in all 50 States, most of the territories. And we charge a small fee, sometimes up to 8 percent, for doing that contracting work to cover our own overhead.

But our pricing model has been incredibly stable and represents a strong value for the customers that choose GPO, say, choosing us instead of DLA.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you.

Mr. SWAGEL, you just mentioned tariffs would reduce the efficiency of the U.S. economy. Is a \$26 trillion debt an efficient economy?

Mr. SWAGEL. No. The large debt undermines the——

Mr. STRONG. Is it efficient to pay another country \$20 million to produce "Sesame Street" to be broadcast?

Mr. SWAGEL. Uh——

Mr. STRONG. Is it efficient for us to buy oil from other countries when we can produce it in America?

Mr. SWAGEL. I mean, you know, depending on the particulars, but the trade deficit is——

Mr. STRONG. Is it efficient for 15 million illegal aliens to come into this country?

Mr. SWAGEL. I mean, that has had a wide impact for State and local governments that have borne the biggest burden on the fiscal side——

Mr. STRONG. Is it efficient to fund illegal aliens when we have U.S. veterans that are sleeping in the streets of America?

Mr. STRONG. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Strong.

I now recognize Ms. Maloy for her 5 minutes.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

When you sit this far down on the table, a lot of the things that you plan on asking have already been asked by the time they get to you.

But, Mr. Dodaro, you talk about the cost savings that you found through your work. In your testimony, you indicated that in fiscal year 2024 GAO's work yielded \$67.5 billion in savings, and then you testified that you save \$123 for every dollar invested in GAO.

Where do those cost-saving estimates come from?

Mr. DODARO. Typically, we use third-party estimates. They may come from CBO. They may come from the Congress if the Congress reduces the agency's budget request.

So, typically, we try to use third-party estimates. And only if those aren't available, we will make our own estimate. But then we will run it by the agency—for example, at DOD. If we say that DOD took action on a recommendation, "We believe it saved this much; do you agree?" And typically they agree.

I believe these estimates are intended to be very conservative and reliable and accurate.

Ms. MALOY. So you also talked about preventing fraud and finding savings. How often do you find an area that is ripe like that and Congress fails to take it up and act on it?

Mr. DODARO. Well, I have a number of open matters for congressional consideration that Congress has not yet acted upon. I would be happy to provide it for the record.

For example, you know, I have recommended for years that the Social Security Administration take the Full Death Master File and provide it to the Treasury Department so we don't pay dead people. And I persuaded the Congress after about 10 years, and right now it is a 3-year pilot. I believe—it has already saved millions of dollars, prevented fraud, prevented improper payments—that Congress should make it permanent. That is not yet done. So that is just giving you one example.

So, you know, Congress has acted in some cases, but in many cases there are still more that should be done and I have recommended it. I will provide it for the record.

[The information follows:]

Selected Open Matters for Congress Related to Improper Payments and Fraud

Source: Emergency Relief Funds: Significant Improvements Are Needed to Ensure Transparency and Accountability for COVID-19 and Beyond (GAO-22-105715)

1. Congress should pass legislation requiring the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to provide guidance for agencies to develop plans for internal control that would then immediately be ready for use in, or adaptation for, future emergencies or crises and requiring agencies to report these internal control plans to OMB and Congress.
2. Congress should amend the Payment Integrity Information Act of 2019 to designate all new federal programs making more than \$100 million in payments in any one fiscal year as "susceptible to significant improper payments" for their initial years of operation.
3. Congress should amend the Payment Integrity Information Act of 2019 to reinstate the requirement that agencies report on their antifraud controls and fraud risk management efforts in their annual financial reports.
4. Congress should establish a permanent analytics center of excellence to aid the oversight community in identifying improper payments and fraud.
5. Congress should clarify that (1) chief financial officers (CFO) at CFO Act agencies have oversight responsibility for internal controls over financial reporting and key financial management information that includes spending data and improper payment information; and (2) executive agency internal control assessment, reporting, and audit requirements for key financial management information, discussed in an existing matter for congressional consideration in our August 2020 report, include internal controls over spending data and improper payment information.
6. Congress should require agency CFOs to (1) submit a statement in agencies' annual financial reports certifying the reliability of improper payments risk assessments and the validity of improper payment estimates, and describing the actions of the CFO to monitor the development and implementation of any corrective action plans; and (2) approve any methodology that is not designed to produce a statistically valid estimate.
7. Congress should consider legislation to require improper payment information required to be reported under the Payment Integrity Information Act of 2019 to be included in agencies' annual financial reports.
8. Congress should amend the DATA Act to extend the previous requirement for agency inspectors general (IG) to review the completeness, timeliness, quality, and accuracy of their respective agency data submissions on a periodic basis.
9. Congress should amend the DATA Act to clarify the responsibilities and authorities of OMB and Department of the Treasury for ensuring the quality of data available on USAspending.gov.
10. Congress should amend the Social Security Act to accelerate and make permanent the requirement for the Social Security Administration to share its full death data with the Department of the Treasury's Do Not Pay working system.

Source: COVID-19: Current and Future Federal Preparedness Requires Fixes to Improve Health Data and Address Improper Payments ([GAO-22-105397](#))

11. Congress should consider providing the Department of Health and Human Services the authority to require states to report the data necessary for the Secretary to estimate and report on improper payments for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program in accordance with 31 U.S.C. § 3352.

Source: Paid Tax Return Preparers: IRS Efforts to Oversee Refundable Credits Help Protect Taxpayers but Additional Actions and Authority Are Needed ([GAO-23-105217](#))

12. Congress should grant IRS the explicit authority to establish professional requirements for paid tax preparers.

Source: Medicare: Claim Review Programs Could Be Improved with Additional Prepayment Reviews and Better Data ([GAO-16-394](#))

13. In order to better ensure proper Medicare payments and protect Medicare funds, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) should seek legislative authority to allow the Recovery Auditors (RA) to conduct prepayment claim reviews. (NOTE: GAO framed this as a recommendation to the agency to seek legislative authority rather than a matter for Congress.)

Ms. MALOY. Yeah, I would appreciate that. I am also going to have my staff follow up with you.

Mr. DODARO. I would be happy to.

Ms. MALOY. Okay.

Mr. DODARO. Yeah. Any fan of preventing fraud is a fan of mine.

Ms. MALOY. Okay. Well, I am a fan of that.

Mr. Swagel, when my colleague was reading his ChatGPT description of your agency, one of the things that he talked about and you mentioned is the nonpartisan mission of CBO. And I think you have a bit of a perception problem on the Hill about that nonpartisan mission.

So I just wanted to ask, how do you, in your hiring practices, try to ensure that you are hiring and training in a way that perpetuates the nonpartisan nature of what you do?

Mr. SWAGEL. Okay. No, thank you. And it is a key aspect of the agency. I mean, it is really the foundation of what we do, is be nonpartisan, not taking policy positions.

When we hire, we look carefully at the people we are hiring, of course, first on the expertise and on the skills they bring but also to make sure that they are both nonpartisan and seen as nonpartisan. And, you know, look, we treat a 22-year-old we are hiring differently than, you know, a 45-year-old, just—you know, we understand, you know, sort of, the difference between those two. But we look at that carefully when we hire.

And after people come on board, we have processes within the agency to scrutinize our work—you know, this is up and down and across the agency—to make sure that we are down the center on the issues.

Ms. MALOY. Okay.

Well, with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the rest of my time.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Ms. Maloy.

And I now recognize Mr. Moore for his 5 minutes.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Appreciate it very much.

Question for Comptroller Dodaro. The chairman has talked about this. I just want to go back to it real quick.

So, in 2018, you issued this letter here to Senator Hatch in a legal decision that GAO's role was essentially complete once the executive submits a rule to Congress.

Is that correct?

Mr. DODARO. As it relates to the Congressional Review Act submissions. But we have other roles that we have, which include responding to requests from Congress—

Mr. MOORE. Right, but—

Mr. DODARO [continuing]. For clarifications.

Mr. MOORE. But you stated in a legal decision that the GAO's role is essentially complete once the executive submits a rule to Congress. Is that correct?

Mr. DODARO. That is correct as it relates to CRA. But what I am saying is, we also have other responsibilities to respond, by statute, to requests from committees and Members of Congress for legal decisions. If anybody asks for a legal decision from GAO, we give it to them—

Mr. MOORE. Right.

Mr. DODARO [continuing]. I mean, as a service to the Congress.

Mr. MOORE. I am trying to understand, then, why it seemed that your actions in this case as it relates to the Clean Air Act waiver for the California EVs mandate seems opposed to that decision.

Mr. DODARO. Well, it is not opposed to that decision. I mean, basically, what it does is explain that decision.

We were asked to clarify our previous legal decisions, which you could argue is an extension of our CRA responsibilities. And so all we were asked to do is to—in the context of what was submitted, to explain our previous decisions.

The Parliamentarian is the one that decides whether or not the issue gets put to a vote in the Congress. That is not our role. Our role is to answer questions from the Congress and to clarify things.

And when we are asked to clarify a previous legal position, I think it is important for us to be able to do that, as opposed to having other people try to interpret our previous legal decisions.

Mr. MOORE. Can I ask you, have you ever spoken to the Senate Parliamentarian?

Mr. DODARO. I have not, but my staff has.

Mr. MOORE. About this issue specifically?

Mr. DODARO. I don't think we had any conversation—let me just check.

No, we did not talk to her on this particular issue.

Mr. MOORE. But other issues?

Mr. DODARO. Well, if she asks for, you know—

Mr. MOORE. Does she have to engage you, or do you engage her?

Mr. DODARO. It can happen either way depending on the issues, but typically we respond to her questions if she has questions on any of our material.

We don't have an ongoing relationship with the Parliamentarian, if that is what you are asking.

Mr. MOORE. And so you are probably not going to be able to answer this now, but if there are previous interactions in between GAO and the Senate Parliamentarian, maybe I would submit a question for the record that they can answer later as it relates to what were the substance, context, and nature of those conversations, I would be curious to know.

And then, I mean, you stated this, but the purpose of the CRA—and this is in your letter—is to strengthen congressional oversight of agency rulemaking. That is a quote.

GAO decided that, because the agency had submitted the rule, Congress is—and I quote—able to fully exercise its review and oversight authorities under CRA and, therefore, takes no position on whether the action by the agency constituted a rule.

Do you agree that precedence in this space is crystal-clear, GAO does not issue legal decisions after an agency has submitted a rule to Congress?

Mr. DODARO. That is correct. This isn't a legal decision, what we did. It is a clarification of a previous legal decision we did. It is not a new legal decision.

Mr. MOORE. But would you say it is fair to characterize that the Parliamentarian's determination is taking it as a legal decision because of the action that she is taking?

Mr. DODARO. I can't speak for the Parliamentarian. All I can do is say, if a Member of Congress comes to us and asks us to explain

a previous legal decision, I would be hard-pressed to say, "No, I can't do that."

I mean, we are just responding to help Congress. We are not trying to, you know, influence things one way or the other. We are nonpartisan. We are asked a question, we give an answer, and it doesn't matter who it is.

Mr. MOORE. Well, I do have some reports outstanding that have been—I mean, folks that have submitted questions that are—they have been out there for, like, over a year. But this one got turned around in 10 days.

Mr. DODARO. Well, that is because it was all——

Mr. MOORE. That is amazing.

Mr. DODARO. Well, not really. You know, basically, all we are doing is explaining something we already did before.

Most of these other requests are asking for original work, where we have to go to the agency and get their opinions and other things. In the case of somebody explaining something of an opinion we have already given, you know, it should be turned around quickly.

You know, I don't get very many complaints from Congress about being timely, you know, so——

Mr. MOORE. Well, this seems to be the only one that was. That is why it is curious.

Mr. DODARO. It is not the only one where we are timely. It is the only one I am getting complaints on lately.

But, you know, I am just saying, our responsibility is to every Member of the Congress, Congress as an institution. If somebody asks us a question, we are going to give them an answer.

Mr. MOORE. So, obviously, as we have talked about, you understand the complications around this issue as it relates to all this. Would you be willing to rescind that decision or opinion?

Mr. DODARO. No.

Mr. MOORE. No. Would you be willing to provide something in writing and maybe provide some more clarity around it?

Mr. DODARO. I would be happy to. If you submit a question for the record, I would be happy to answer it.

Mr. MOORE. All right.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. VALADAO. All right.

If there are no further questions, I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

And, as was mentioned today, I really hope that we use our taxpayer resources to be fair and balanced and not go down this path.

And I know there will be additional questions for the record. I will be submitting some myself.

Mr. VALADAO. And this committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 9:58 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

[The information follows:]

April 4, 2025

The Congressional Budget Office's Mission and
How the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Request Supports It

The Congressional Budget Office provides objective, nonpartisan information to support the budget process and to help the Congress make effective budget and economic policy. CBO aims for its analysis to be timely, rigorous, insightful, and clearly explained. The agency makes no policy recommendations.

Under the Budget Act, CBO works for all Congressional committees, with its chief responsibility being to help the Budget Committees with the matters under their jurisdiction. Priority under the act is also given to the House and Senate Appropriations, House Ways and Means, and Senate Finance Committees. The agency also works closely with the leadership of both chambers. Each year, the agency's roughly 270 staff fulfill thousands of requests for technical assistance, produce hundreds of cost estimates for proposed legislation, and prepare dozens of reports and other materials on a variety of topics.

CBO seeks to provide budgetary and economic information when it is most useful. One of the agency's most important objectives is to review each piece of legislation ahead of floor consideration. In 2024, CBO published estimates for nearly all of the bills ordered reported by an authorizing committee before they were considered on the floor of either the House or the Senate.

Often on fast turnarounds, CBO provides technical assistance that takes various forms and occurs throughout the legislative process. For example, CBO supports the Appropriations Committees as they craft legislation by providing real-time provision-by-provision estimates for annual appropriation bills, supplemental appropriation bills, and continuing resolutions and by explaining complicated estimating issues. CBO also reviews, for hundreds of Members, thousands of proposed amendments to legislation. In addition, the agency helps—in phone calls, emails, and meetings—Members and their staff as they consider and draft bills and when they ask questions about a complicated estimate or report.

CBO's budget request will enable the agency to provide more analysis when the Congress needs it. CBO's budget request of \$75.8 million would support 285 employees, an increase of 15—enough to satisfy the agency's responsibilities under the Budget Act. Of the new staff members in 2026, 9 would extend CBO's capabilities to provide timely analysis of changes to health care programs, border security, credit programs (like student loans), and the economy and of dynamic effects of policies that affect the economy and, in turn, the federal budget; 2 would enhance CBO's responsiveness in producing cost estimates and providing technical assistance in the legislative process; 1 would add to legal assistance; 1 would improve the readability and accessibility of CBO's materials; 1 would bolster CBO's information technology security; and 1 would boost outreach to Congressional staff and the press.

By increasing the expertise and modeling capability in areas in which CBO expects the Congress to have increased interest (for example, defense and homeland security, economic implications of fiscal policy, and long-term projections), the agency will be better able to provide the cost estimates and reports to the Congress in a timely way.

April 4, 2025

**Summary of the Congressional Budget Office's
Request for Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2026**

CBO's Funding Over Five Years and Its Current Request
Thousands of dollars

		2021	2022	2023	2024	2025, enacted	2026, requested
CBO's activities							
11.1	Full-time permanent positions	35,324	36,737	38,738	40,376	41,779	43,919
11.3	Other than full-time permanent	1,374	1,601	1,708	1,912	2,142	2,343
11.5	Other personnel compensation	755	881	925	1,045	1,155	1,155
	Subtotal	37,453	39,219	41,370	43,333	45,076	47,417
12.1	Personnel benefits	14,419	15,316	16,245	16,779	17,562	18,193
	Total, pay	51,872	54,534	57,615	60,112	62,638	65,610
13	Benefits for former personnel	3	0	4	0	0	0
21	Travel and transportation of persons	7	88	94	106	200	200
23	Communications, utilities, and miscellaneous charges	426	465	431	375	433	812
24	Printing and reproduction	0	13	20	0	5	5
25	Other services	3,938	4,492	4,400	8,084	6,338	7,834
26	Supplies and materials	436	422	437	308	332	400
31	Equipment	589	926	202	956	54	896
	Total, nonpay	5,399	6,406	5,588	9,830	7,362	10,147
	Total obligations	57,268	60,940	63,199	69,942	70,000	75,757
	Percentage change from prior fiscal year	4.3	6.4	3.7	10.7	0.1	8.2
Memorandum:							
	Full-time-equivalent positions	267	269	273	268	271	278

The Congressional Budget Office requests appropriations of \$75.8 million for fiscal year 2026: 86.6 percent would be for pay and benefits; 9.8 percent, for information technology; and 3.6 percent, for training, expert consultant services, office supplies, and other items. The request amounts to an increase of \$5.8 million, or 8.2 percent, from the funding provided this year.

Personnel Costs. CBO requests an increase in personnel costs of \$3.0 million, or 4.7 percent, from the \$62.6 million devoted to such costs in fiscal year 2025. The amount would primarily fund inflation adjustments and performance-based salary increases for current staff in 2026. Employees earning less than \$100,000 would receive an across-the-board increase of 3.8 percent, whereas employees earning \$100,000 or more (for whom more of their compensation is based on performance) would receive a 1.8 percent increase. The requested increase would also fund the hiring of 15 new staff members in 2026. They would allow CBO to provide even more timely analyses to the Congress in the areas of health care, border security, credit programs, and the economy—as well as bolster the agency's capabilities for dynamic analysis. They would also allow the agency to enhance responsiveness in producing cost estimates and providing technical assistance in the legislative process. The requested increase would cover growth in the cost of federal benefits for current staff and would fund benefits for the 15 new staff members in 2026.

Nonpersonnel Costs. CBO requests an increase of \$2.8 million for nonpersonnel costs. The requested increase would, among other things, allow CBO to expand its cloud infrastructure; improve its ability to detect, assess, and recover from cyberattacks; and bolster its continuity of operations following a disruption. Much of the agency's spending on cybersecurity is the cost of maintaining access to data that are essential to CBO's analyses.

Numbers in the text and table may not add up to totals because of rounding.

Government Accountability Office

GAO's Mission:

GAO exists to support the Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people. GAO remains steadfastly committed to providing nonpartisan, professional and objective program and technical expertise to support Congress in overseeing the executive branch.

Scope and Demand for GAO Work:

GAO performs a range of oversight-, insight-, and foresight-related engagements, a vast majority of which are conducted in response to congressional mandates or requests. GAO's engagements include evaluations of federal programs and performance, financial and management audits, policy analyses, legal opinions, bid protest adjudications, and investigations.

Demand for GAO work remains high. In FY 2024, we received 568 requests for work from 93 percent of the full committees of the Congress—supporting a broad range of congressional interests. We issued 718 total products and made 1,484 new recommendations. We testified 60 times before 39 separate committees or subcommittees on topics including improving veterans' access to healthcare in rural areas, F-35 costs and engine modernization, challenges related to preventing and recovering disability insurance overpayments, and using AI in criminal investigations.

Impact of GAO Work:

Since 2002, GAO's work has resulted in over \$1.45 trillion in financial benefits and over 29,450 program and operational benefits that helped change laws, improve public safety and other services, and promote better management throughout the government.

In fiscal year 2024 alone, GAO's work:

- yielded about \$67.5 billion in financial benefits—a return of about \$76 for every dollar invested in GAO; our average return on investment over the past six years is \$123 to \$1; and
- identified 1,232 other benefits—those that cannot be measured in dollars but that led to program and operational improvements across the government.



Source: GAO. | GAO-25-900570

We maintain our High-Risk Program to focus attention on government operations that are vulnerable to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement or need transformation—offering solutions to 37 high-risk problems. In FY 2024, our high-risk work yielded \$45.6 billion in financial benefits and 466 other benefits. Also, we annually report on the fragmentation, overlap, and duplication of federal government resources. From 2011-2024, we identified 2,018 such actions. Based on the most recent data available, the Congress and federal agencies had fully or partially addressed about 73 percent of all matters and recommendations (1,480 of 2,018) yielding about \$667 billion in financial benefits.

FY 2026 Budget Request:

GAO's FY 2026 resource request will allow us to continue to provide Congress with high-quality products that address both longstanding and emerging national interests. Key focus areas include:

- evaluating the national security enterprise;

- continuing to enhance science and technology capabilities;
- advancing the fight against fraud;
- bolstering efforts to identify public and private cyber threats; and
- evaluating challenges associated with growing health care costs.

Internally, the funding requested builds upon GAO's multi-year effort to ensure that it has the 21st century tools and technologies needed to support our workforce and achieve our mission. This includes enhanced cloud data management and storage solutions, and IT security upgrades to combat the ever-growing cybersecurity threats toward U.S. assets. The request will also support GAO's Innovation Lab planned work.

This request continues support for long deferred infrastructure maintenance needs. For instance, the headquarters building is encumbered with some electrical equipment that is at the end of its current useful life. Failure to replace raises safety concerns and the risk of power loss at the headquarters building.

In addition, we have begun space optimization projects for both the headquarters building and our field offices to increase our leasable space in headquarters and decrease our leased space footprint in the field. The GAO workforce is our most critical asset, and it is imperative that GAO provide a safe and secure workplace in an efficient manner that recognizes the evolving nature of office space use.

With the support of this Subcommittee, we have made great progress in saving federal funds and achieving our mission of improving government performance and accountability. The FY 2026 budget request will allow us to continue to build on this progress. The results that we deliver Congress and the American taxpayer year in and year out is due to our talented, multidisciplinary, professional staff. As the table shows, our people consistently represent over 80 percent of our budget. The FY 2026 budget request would allow us to maintain staffing levels.

Much of the growth in our staffing levels over the past five years has been focused on recruiting science and technology and cybersecurity expertise. These efforts are in line with direction from Congress and has enabled us to provide Congress with timely and insightful analysis of emerging technological advancements and challenges.

Effect of FY 2025 Continuing Resolution on GAO's Funding Priorities:

Critical GAO mission-related activities would be halted or slowed in a full-year FY 2025 CR and jeopardize our ability to respond to Congressional requests. At CR funding levels, GAO would be only available to support internal cybersecurity and the protection of people and property. This will result in the delay of new technology needed to improve our efficiency. Moreover, our efforts to respond to Congressional expectations to increase our science and technology efforts would be curtailed. Similarly, GAO's work on fraud waste, and abuse and reducing improper payments across government would also need to be scaled back commensurate with funding, limiting GAO's ability to assist Congress identify measures critical to reducing the deficit. The FY 2026 request seeks to restore GAO close to current levels of staff and service, but not include any expansion of capacity in any priority areas except for disaster-related work when supplemental funding is provided. With the significant reduction of affordable FTE under a full-year CR, there are risks that important projects and requests from Congress may be delayed or deferred until after the FY 2026 budget is enacted and GAO can build back to current capacity.

FY 2024 – 2026 Summary of Resources by Program (dollars in thousands)							
Program	FY 2024 Actual		FY 2025 Full Year CR		FY 2026 Request		Net Change 2025 / 2026
	FTE	Amount	FTE	Amount	FTE	Amount	
Human capital	3,564	\$730,139	3,543	\$757,834	3,505	\$793,380	(38) \$35,546
Engagement support		11,625		7,500		12,900	5,400
Infrastructure operations		145,276		112,857		188,350	75,493
Office of Inspector General	12	2,746	17	4,677	23	6,808	6 2,131
Center for Audit Excellence		4,498		4,500		4,730	230
IJA FY24 No-Year Direct Carry Over		917		0		0	0
Lapse		556		0		0	0
Total budget authority	3,576	\$895,757	3,560	\$887,368	3,528	\$1,006,168	(32) \$118,800
Offsets		(\$83,863)		(\$75,474)		(\$72,189)	\$3,285
Appropriation		\$811,894		\$811,894		\$933,979	(32) \$122,085

GPO Snapshot

The Government Publishing Office is a business-like enterprise providing publishing and printing services to all three branches of government. The Agency was named by Forbes Magazine as one of America's Best Places to Work four years in a row and one of the Nation's Best Employers for Veterans for the third consecutive year.

Mission

Publish trusted information for the Federal Government to the American people.

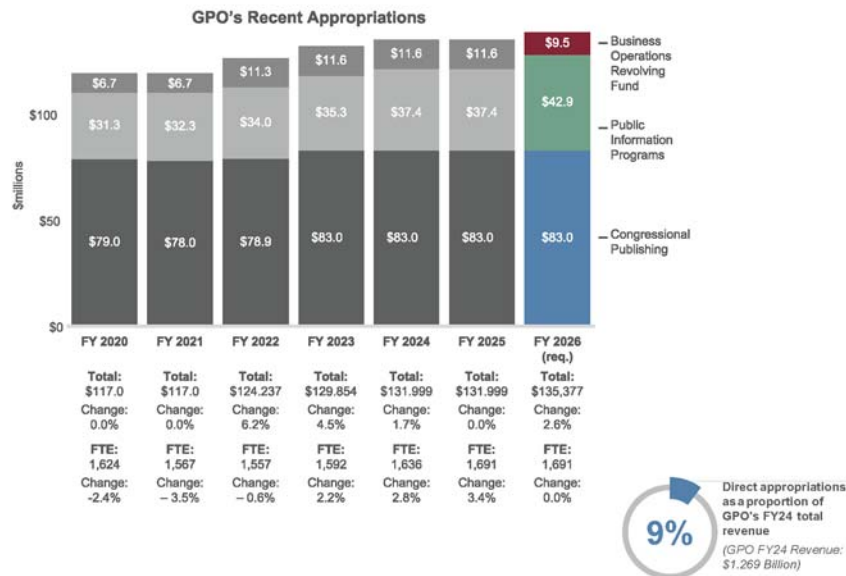
Business Snapshot

GPO manufactures and publishes a variety of products for all three branches of government. In FY 2024, GPO had operating revenue of \$1.27 billion. Only about 9.2 percent of that amount is appropriated, the rest coming from billings to other Federal customers. The following table describes the major lines of business for GPO and their contribution to the overall financial position of the Agency.

		FY24 (000s)
Appropriations Received	Congressional Printing (Congressional Record, Bills, other products).....	\$83,000
	Public Information Programs (FDLP, GovInfo)	\$37,388
	Appropriated Revolving Fund Programs	\$11,611
Revenue for Major Products and Services	Passport Production	\$504,726
	Contract Printing for Federal Agencies.....	\$469,231
	Other Federal Printing (Federal Register, CFR, Budget, WH publications).....	\$63,639
	Other Secure Credentials (Global Entry cards, NEXUS, TWIC, etc.).....	\$75,546
	Publication Sales and Distributions	\$18,904

Some FY 2024 Production Highlights

- Produced about 21.8 million Next Generation Passports for the State Department and more than 8.3 million secure card credentials for Federal agency customers.
- Supported over 1.7 billion online information retrievals of public documents through GovInfo digital repository.
- Supplied 1,097 FDLP libraries nationwide with tangible and digital publications.
- Advanced *Project Common Press* and produced millions of pages of Congressional Record and Federal Register, as well as committee reports, bills, resolutions, and amendments.
- Created tickets, programs, commemorative gifts, and signage for the 60th Presidential Inaugural Ceremony.

GPO APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST
 Fiscal Year 2026

GPO's FY 2026 Budget Request – \$135,377,000
Congressional Publishing – \$83,000,000

This account pays for the costs of publishing congressional documents - bills, reports, hearings, the Congressional Record, and other publications - in digital and tangible formats. The request for FY 2026 of \$83,000,000 is flat compared to the FY 2025 level. Congressional Publishing workload volumes are estimated to decrease by about \$4,985,000 in FY 2026. Price-level and wage increases are expected to increase by about \$2,300,000. GPO's request for FY 2026 does not anticipate using prior-year transfer funds, a reduction of \$2,685,000 from the FY 2025 estimate.

Public Information Programs of the Superintendent of Documents – \$42,852,000

This account pays for the costs of providing Federal government publications in digital and tangible formats to 1,097 Federal depository libraries nationwide, cataloging and indexing, the distribution of documents to recipients designated by law, and international exchange distributions. The net increase of \$5,464,000 for FY 2026 is comprised of mandatory pay and related increases and price-level changes of \$900,000, and \$4,564,000 for supporting: the transition to digitized information; Congressionally Mandated Reports initiative support; needed system upgrades and functionality for FDL P applications, including askGPO and the Catalog of U.S. Government Publications; and, printing costs due to a reduction in the use of prior-year transfers in FY 2025 for printing shortfalls.

Business Operations Revolving Fund – \$9,525,000

GPO requests \$5,450,000 for GovInfo, an ISO-certified, public access Trustworthy Digital Repository, for collection development and system infrastructure, and \$4,075,000 for XPub System development, an XML-based composition ecosystem, to replace the proprietary MicroComp system.

Questions for the Record
Government Accountability Office
The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro, Comptroller General
FY2026

Chairman Valadao

1. **While you assured us that the GAO opinion issued on March 6th, 2025, regarding the three Clean Air Act waivers that were submitted to the Congress for review under the provisions of the Congressional Review Act was not a partisan issue, I remain skeptical. What steps have you taken to ensure your staff's responses and work are strictly non-partisan?**

How do you ensure staff are not prioritizing or expediting work that agrees with their public political bias towards their preferred party?

GAO views its independence and nonpartisanship as core to its mission, and thus, we have numerous controls in place to help ensure all work is carried out in a nonpartisan, objective, and nonideological manner. These controls are at the institutional and individual levels.

First, all GAO products are institutional, not individually authored, products. No one individual can control the findings and recommendations of a GAO product. GAO's quality assurance framework sets forth the standards and requirements that all GAO products must meet before they can be issued. Importantly, the framework includes multiple levels of supervisory and internal stakeholder review. For example, a product is initially subject to multiple levels of supervisory review within their mission teams. GAO managers are regularly trained on what to look for in their reviews, which includes completeness, balance, evidence, and accuracy of the product. The product is also reviewed by internal stakeholders, who are assigned based on their subject matter expertise to ensure the product is contextually sophisticated.

After the product passes these levels of review, audit products are sent to our quality review office, who assigns a seasoned, independent reviewer who examines the product to ensure it meets GAO standards. Legal products are sent to the General Counsel for review and approval. All products are also subject to multiple rounds of fact-checking, including a review by an independent GAO staff person (e.g., analyst not assigned to the audit). In totality, these reviews (controls) help ensure that our products meet generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS) and legal standards, including that the products are objective, evidence-based, professional, and nonpartisan.

Second, our Congressional Protocols and Legal Protocols guide our institutional decisions on accepting and prioritizing requests. Designed in consultation with Congress, the

Congressional Protocols, as originally issued in 2000 and updated in 2004 and 2017 have been effective in allowing GAO to work constructively with the Congress to conduct our work in accordance with congressional priorities. The Congressional Protocols established well-accepted principles and approaches for communicating with and making commitments to the Congress, including outlining the factors that we will consider in determining whether to accept congressional requests for work and our priorities for undertaking engagement work, which are 1) congressional mandates (provisions in statute or committee or conference reports); 2) senior congressional and committee (Chair and Ranking Member) leadership requests; and 3) individual Member requests. Under our Legal Protocols, originally issued in 2006 and updated in 2024, requests for legal opinions on matters of appropriations law, the Congressional Review Act, and the Federal Vacancies Reform Act may come from committee leadership or from individual Members.

Mandates account for about half of our workload and by definition are bipartisan in nature. Specifically, we keep both the majority and minority informed of our work as it is conducted, we address the reports to both parties, and we make the final report available to all Members at the same time. Requests from committee leadership account for the other half of our workload, and about one-third of these requests are also bipartisan.

Using our congressional and legal protocols, each week senior executives, including the Chief Operating Officer, meet to review all congressional requests and mandates received the preceding week. As a collective body, senior leaders determine whether we will accept the requested work, which mission team will lead the work, which internal stakeholders will be assigned to assist with the work, and when we will be able to start the work. Individual staff do not make decisions about accepting or prioritizing work.

Third, all GAO staff must remain free of conflicts of interests, both real and perceived. Staff conduct their work on engagements under GAGAS, which emphasizes the importance of independence. Similarly, GAO's Legal Protocols emphasize that legal decisions, like all GAO products, are professional, objective, fact-based, nonpartisan, and non-ideological. Staff are required to sign a Statement of Independence each year as part of the annual financial disclosure process, attesting to the absence of any threat to their independence requiring safeguards and promising to notify the appropriate official if a threat to independence requiring safeguards should arise. Additionally, all staff are required to attest to their independence for all assigned work when completing their time and attendance reports every two weeks.

Staff also must seek supervisory approval to engage in outside activities (i.e., activities outside of work hours), such as volunteering on a nonprofit board. In considering these applications, supervisors consider whether GAO conducts work in the space and the how the activity could impact others' perceptions of the staff's independence and objectivity. Analysts are also required to take biennial training on GAGAS independence requirements. In addition, senior agency leadership, including the Comptroller General, frequently speak to staff about their responsibilities to adhere to our independence standards at townhalls and staff meetings.

Fourth, GAO undergoes an external peer review, which is conducted by independent supreme auditing institutions. The peer review team examines our system of quality control

for work conducted under GAGAS to determine whether it is suitably designed and operating effectively. The peer review also includes tests of compliance with certain specific GAGAS requirements, such as training, and a review of GAO's own annual internal inspection program. Our latest peer review was issued in September 2023; we once again passed the review. The peer review team confirmed that our system of quality control was suitably designed and that we were complying with it. The team concluded that the quality control system provides reasonable assurance that we are meeting the sections of GAGAS that apply to GAO's performance and financial audit practices. GAO has always received the highest rating from its independent peer reviews.

Finally, I would note that GAO issues hundreds of products each year and we have issued thousands during my tenure as Comptroller General. While some may dislike or disagree with the conclusions of these products, rarely, if ever, is our commitment to conducting our work in a nonpartisan manner questioned. For example, when we issued our 2023 legal decision on the EPA waivers, no one suggested that our finding that the waivers were orders was partisan or politically motivated. This is because of our well-earned reputation of being a neutral, reliable arbiter of the facts. This speaks to our staff's commitment to the nonpartisan mission of GAO and our culture of holding ourselves to the highest standards of quality. It also speaks to how we treat requests for work the same, regardless of whether they come from the majority or minority party. Our congressional protocols prioritize requests from Chairs and Ranking Members the same in terms of undertaking work. Further, our system of controls ensures that we produce evidence-based, professional, and objective products, and that we would provide the same response to anyone who asked the same question. Finally, we work with both the majority and minority parties on most of our work, and as a result both sides have a first-hand view of our commitment to our values.

2. **In your prepared testimony, you highlighted five key areas in which GAO works to provide value to the "nation and Congress." One of these areas is "Fraud Prevention" in which you state that GAO estimated that the federal government lost between \$233 billion and \$521 billion annually between Fiscal Years 2018 – 2022. This level of fraud is an astounding number, even when we consider the size of the U.S. budget and our large mandatory spending programs such as Social Security and Medicare.**

Which agencies have the highest levels of fraud, and what has GAO done to call out this number with the agencies greatest impacted by these levels of fraud?

What has been the response by these agencies to your fraud estimates? How are they attempting to recoup any of these funds for taxpayers? Please share some examples.

GAO developed an estimate of government-wide fraud. Better data and additional analyses are needed to estimate fraud at the individual agency or program levels and determine which have the highest levels of fraud. Accordingly, in 2024, we made recommendations to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of the Treasury to advance efforts that would allow for reliable estimates at the agency or program level ([GAO-24-105833](#)).

We and others have reported on some program-level fraud estimates that rely on a variety of different methodologies to provide context on specific areas. For example,

- GAO estimated between \$100 billion to \$135 billion in fraud losses in pandemic unemployment insurance benefits ([GAO-23-106696](#)),
- the Small Business Administration (SBA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) estimated \$200 billion in fraud losses for the Payment Protection Program and COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan fraud programs,
- the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated \$1.02 billion in trafficked benefits annually from 2015 to 2017 in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and
- the National Health Care Antifraud Association reported that Medicare and Medicaid losses to fraud could be \$100 billion annually.

GAO has called out program integrity concerns at a number of agencies in our audit work, testimonies, presentations, and other venues. Notably, in our High-Risk List we have reported that reducing fraud and improper payments is critical to better managing the cost of government. These include two of the fastest-growing programs—Medicare and Medicaid—and the unemployment insurance system and the Earned Income Tax Credit. Several other programs are also on the High-Risk List due, in part to challenges linked to improper payments or fraud risk management. These include SBA’s emergency loans for small businesses and Department of Defense financial management. Areas on the High-Risk List include programs that represented over 66 percent of the total \$162 billion in reported improper payment estimates for fiscal year 2024.

Beyond financial impacts, payment integrity issues erode public trust in government and hinder agencies’ efforts to execute their missions and achieve program objectives effectively and efficiently. In March 2025, we testified on actions identified from our prior work that agencies can take to better manage improper payments and fraud risks ([GAO-25-108172](#)). These included:

- Focusing on preventive controls to stop payment errors and fraud before they occur.
- Conducting regular risk assessments to help program managers identify and respond to payment integrity risks, including fraud.
- Establishing accountability by designating responsible officials and clearly assigning roles and responsibilities for managing risks.
- Sharing data and using technology as part of a strategy for improving program integrity.
- Preparing for the next emergency, including through developing internal control plans that can be quickly deployed in future emergencies.

GAO’s audit work has also highlighted specific examples of fraud and fraud risks impacting the federal government and made hundreds of recommendations to enhance fraud risk management. Importantly in 2015, GAO issued the Fraud Risk Framework which provides a comprehensive set of key components and leading practices that serve as a guide for agency managers to use

when developing efforts to combat fraud in a strategic, risk-based manner. This work helped spur Congress to enact related legislation.

In June 2016, Congress enacted the Fraud Reduction and Data Analytics Act of 2015. This act required OMB to establish guidelines for federal agencies to create controls to identify and assess fraud risks and to design and implement antifraud control activities. The act further required OMB to incorporate the leading practices from GAO's Fraud Risk Framework in these guidelines. In its 2016 Circular No. A-123 guidelines, OMB directed agencies to adhere to the Fraud Risk Framework's leading practices as part of their efforts to effectively design, implement, and operate an internal control system that addresses fraud risks. The act was repealed and replaced in March 2020 by the Payment Integrity Information Act of 2019, which required these guidelines to remain in effect. In its 2021 update to Appendix C to Circular No. A-123 guidelines, OMB provided guidance to agencies to improve their controls for identifying, assessing, mitigating, and monitoring payment integrity risks, including fraud.

To support agencies' progress on fraud prevention, GAO issued its web-based Antifraud Resource in early 2022. The resource provides interactive information about fraud schemes affecting agency programs and resources for combatting it. The Antifraud Resource provides a detailed discussion of the characteristics of fraud that affect the federal government and has over 240 case examples of fraud affecting a wide array of federal programs and operations. These examples are intended to help identify indicators of fraud, which can be helpful in preventing fraud. In addition, GAO staff provide training on fraud risk management requirements, GAO's leading practices, and analytic techniques at dozens of events per year. Through presentations hosted by the CFO-Council, individual agencies, professional associations, and more, GAO's work has reached thousands of program managers to aid in their implementation of fraud risk management requirements.

In addition to audit work, we issued guidance and updated standards to help managers address risk areas related to fraud and improper payments, including fraud. For example, in 2023, we issued our *Framework for Managing Improper Payments in Emergency Assistance Programs*. This framework provides Congress and federal agencies with an overall approach to preventing and reducing improper payments in emergency assistance programs. Additionally, in May 2025, we issued revised *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, including updates to prioritize preventive control activities and the need consider risks related to improper payments.

GAO has also identified actions Congress can take to further improve the federal government's capabilities for safeguarding funds. In March 2022, we identified the following 10 matters for congressional consideration to enhance the transparency and accountability of federal spending ([GAO-22-105715](#)). All 10 remain open as of May 2025. (See table.)

Table: Prior GAO Matters for Congressional Consideration to Ensure Transparency and Accountability for COVID-19 and Beyond that Remain Open and Unimplemented as of May 2025

Matter

Matter 1	Congress should pass legislation requiring the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to provide guidance for agencies to develop plans for internal control that would then immediately be ready for use in, or adaptation for, future emergencies or crises and requiring agencies to report these internal control plans to OMB and Congress.
Matter 2	Congress should amend the Payment Integrity Information Act of 2019 to designate all new federal programs making more than \$100 million in payments in any one fiscal year as “susceptible to significant improper payments” for their initial years of operation.
Matter 3	Congress should amend the Payment Integrity Information Act of 2019 to reinstate the requirement that agencies report on their antifraud controls and fraud risk management efforts in their annual financial reports.
Matter 4	Congress should establish a permanent analytics center of excellence to aid the oversight community in identifying improper payments and fraud.
Matter 5	Congress should clarify that (1) chief financial officers (CFO) at CFO Act agencies have oversight responsibility for internal controls over financial reporting and key financial management information that includes spending data and improper payment information; and (2) executive agency internal control assessment, reporting, and audit requirements for key financial management information, discussed in an existing matter for congressional consideration in our August 2020 report, include internal controls over spending data and improper payment information.
Matter 6	Congress should require agency CFOs to (1) submit a statement in agencies’ annual financial reports certifying the reliability of improper payments risk assessments and the validity of improper payment estimates, and describing the actions of the CFO to monitor the development and implementation of any corrective action plans; and (2) approve any methodology that is not designed to produce a statistically valid estimate.
Matter 7	Congress should consider legislation to require improper payment information required to be reported under the Payment Integrity Information Act of 2019 to be included in agencies’ annual financial reports.
Matter 8	Congress should amend the DATA Act to extend the previous requirement for agency inspectors general to review the completeness, timeliness, quality, and accuracy of their respective agency data submissions on a periodic basis.
Matter 9	Congress should amend the DATA Act to clarify the responsibilities and authorities of OMB and Department of the Treasury for ensuring the quality of data available on USAspending.gov.
Matter 10	Congress should amend the Social Security Act to accelerate and make permanent the requirement for the Social Security Administration to share its full death data with the Department of the Treasury’s Do Not Pay working system.

Source: GAO. | [GAO-22-105715](#).

Our recommendations have led to billions in savings. For example, in June 2020, we recommended that SBA implement plans to respond to risks in the Paycheck Protection program, help ensure program integrity, and address potential fraud. In response SBA developed a loan review process in December 2020. As of the end of fiscal year 2023, we estimated that SBA's use of additional safeguards in the Paycheck Protection program and other COVID programs has resulted in more than \$12 billion in savings.

In another example, we previously suggested that Congress consider amending the Social Security Act to explicitly allow the Social Security Administration to share its full death data with Treasury's Do Not Pay system, a data matching service for agencies to use in preventing payments to ineligible individuals (GAO-17-15). In December 2020, Congress passed and the President signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, which requires the Social Security Administration, to the extent feasible, to share its full death data with Treasury's Do Not Pay working system for a 3-year period, effective on the date that is 3 years from enactment of that act. In January 2025, Treasury reported recovering \$31 million in payments to deceased individuals during a 5-month period on the pilot with the SSA Full Death Master file. As noted in the table, in 2022, we recommended that Congress make permanent Treasury's access to the full death data and believe doing so will lead to significant cost savings and improved program integrity.

Regarding agencies' efforts to recoup payments made in error, agencies can take administrative actions to recover certain funds like improper payments, but fraud concerns are to be referred to OIGs. Agencies should focus on prevention because that is the most cost-effective use of their resources. Being able to determine the value of preventive investments complements recovery efforts and underlies our 2024 recommendations to the Treasury and OMB. Treasury has recently reached out to initiate technical discussions around methods for developing more granular estimates, which would support agencies' ability to measure the returns on investment in fraud prevention and detection efforts.

With respect to improper payment recoveries for fiscal year 2024, agencies reported recovering \$22.6 billion, according to [PaymentAccuracy.gov](#). The total recovered represents about 67 percent of the total \$33.5 billion in improper payments identified for recovery. Agencies should attempt to promptly recover overpayments when they occur, and post-payment controls, such as recovery audits, are an important part of this effort. We reported in June 2023 that agencies have had success reducing improper payments by establishing accountability mechanisms for program integrity and using tools to verify program eligibility in advance of payments.

Federal agencies can leverage Treasury's Do Not Pay system to conduct data matching in order to prevent payments to ineligible recipients. Treasury's Office of Payment Integrity offers resources dedicated to preventing and detecting improper payments through a variety of data-matching and data-analytics services. Treasury's fiscal year 2024 agency financial report notes that the department's efforts combatting improper payments and fraud yielded over \$4 billion in prevention and recovery, representing a seven-fold increase compared to fiscal year 2023 (\$652 million).

With respect to fraud concerns referred to the OIGs and the Department of Justice, investigative results and recoveries are reported in various ways, such as in semi-annual reports, taskforce reports, annual False Claims Act recovery trends reports, and press releases.

According to DOJ's COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force 2024 Report, as of the end of 2023, civil administrative, and civil and criminal judicial cases, resulted in the forfeiture of more than \$1 billion in fraudulent proceeds. Our April 2025 report also noted fraud cases associated with 2,532 defendant that had been found guilty of fraud-related charged involving pandemic-relief programs as of December 31, 2024. While the state of limitations to bring COVID-19 unemployment cases was extended to 10 years, other COVID-19 cases have started to expire. Across the federal government, the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency reported \$18.4 billion in OIG investigative receivables and recoveries for fiscal year 2024.

3. I note in your budget documents that both your Return on Investment and implementation rates percentages are declining. What do you see as the reason for this decline, and when can we expect to see a change in this trend?

Addressing all open GAO recommendations would generate hundreds of billions of additional financial benefits for the government. For example, GAO has recommended that Congress consider equalizing the rates Medicare pays for certain health care services, which often vary depending on whether the service is performed in hospital or office settings. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that equalizing payment rates could result in \$156.9 billion in financial benefits from fiscal years 2025 through 2034. Given the recent focus on government efficiency and cost savings, we anticipate that the Administration and Congress will implement more of our recommendations. If so, this will have a positive effect on our return on investment (ROI).

GAO's ROI is calculated by dividing the financial benefits achieved by the agency's budget. GAO consistently documents a large number of financial benefits each year. Last year we documented \$67.5 billion in financial benefits, which is exactly the average annual amount in each of the last 5 years. The slight decline in the ROI reflects increased costs due to expanding our science and technology capacity as directed by Congress and required personnel expenditures—not a decline in the number of financial benefits achieved.

We consistently achieve a large number of financial benefits each year because our evaluative audit work leads to recommendations for improvement. Over the past 5 years, we have averaged 1,429 recommendations each year. In FY24, we made 1,484 recommendations.

Multiple factors contribute to the implementation rate of our recommendations. First, agencies and Congress are not required to implement our recommendations. Second, competing Administration and congressional priorities and focus can affect implementation rates. Specifically, Congress and the Administration can have different priorities and goals during general election years, the end of an Administration, or during national emergencies—all of which can affect implementation rates. For example, in FY16 the last year of the Obama Administration and a general election year, the implementation rate dropped by 6 percent from the previous fiscal year to 73 percent. Finally, in recent years, the problems facing government

have become increasingly complex and involve multiple agencies, which results in increased time taken by the agencies for implementation of our recommendations.

Despite the voluntary nature of our recommendations, we generally maintain a high rate of implementation—consistently over 70 percent—because we make a strong, evidence-based case for change. We also follow up with the agencies to encourage implementation of the recommendation. Each year we also send letters to agency heads identifying priority recommendations that could yield significant benefits to encourage expedited implementation. But, like you, we want to see the implementation rate even higher because of savings and improvements that could be realized.

Given these potential benefits, we have redoubled our efforts to help increase implementation of our recommendations. The efforts include meeting with agency officials to identify causes for delayed action on recommendations. The CG discusses the importance of implementing the recommendations when he meets with newly confirmed agency heads.

In addition, as required by the National Defense Authorization Act of 2023, we now annually report on open recommendations to Congress to highlight the benefits of implementing these recommendations. In our May 2025 report, we identified 272 open recommendations to Congress (GAO-25-108167). Of these recommendations, 54 could result in financial benefits, with 13 producing \$1 billion or more each in financial benefits if implemented. Congress is considering ways to address many of the remaining open matters. As of February 2025, bills introduced in the 118th and 119th Congresses would have, if enacted, fully or partially addressed 89, or about 33 percent, of the 272 open matters. To encourage implementation of these recommendations, this month we also reached out to congressional committees to offer a list of recommendations to Congress and executive branch agencies that could produce significant savings. Several of our open recommendations are included in various reconciliation bills.

Ranking Member Espallat

Across the Legislative Branch, many requested increases have been compounded due to a failure to complete the 2025 appropriations process.

- 1. Please explain the impact of the full-year continuing resolution on your current budgets and how it affects your requests for fiscal year 2026.**

As a result of operating at full-year continuing resolution (CR) funding levels in FY 2025, critical GAO mission-related activities have been halted and building infrastructure and IT needs have been deferred. For example, we slowed hiring from the outset of the fiscal year because we were under a CR, and we subsequently halted almost all hiring after the full year CR was passed. As a result, based on our most recent FY25 budget projections, we will finish this fiscal year with 66 fewer staff than at the end of FY24. We also deferred infrastructure projects, including replacing the headquarters building's electrical vault and repairing building security stations. We delayed critical IT-related projects, such as ongoing IT modernization efforts (i.e., cloud migration) and internal cyber security efforts aimed at meeting the growing threat to GAO's information systems. We also slowed and have had to delay certain Innovation Lab projects intended to

improve our capability to conduct increasingly complex advanced analytics. Delaying infrastructure and IT projects can increase the risk of system failure, increase costs, and decrease productivity due to the inefficiencies that are created by delaying projects.

The FY25 full year CR, which was about a 5 percent year over year decrease because of required personnel cost increases, affects our FY26 budget request in several ways. First, using the FY24 budget level as the base inflates the requested increase in our FY26 budget request. For example, had we received the House mark of \$896,700,000 for FY25, the percent increase in our FY26 budget request would have been about 3 percent rather than the 15 percent increase over the FY24 budget level. Second, the FY26 budget request was developed to help us build back the staff capacity that was lost (about 66 staff) due to the FY25 full year CR. Finally, to help maintain current levels of service to the Congress under the full-year CR we are using more offsetting receipts (i.e., rental income) in FY25 to supplement our appropriated dollars than initially projected. This means we will have fewer offsetting receipts available next year and beyond.

2. In addition, please detail which services to Congress will be impacted if your budgets remain frozen through fiscal year 2026.

All services that we provide Congress will be negatively impacted if our budget remains frozen in FY26. We are a knowledge-based institution. Over 80 percent of our budget is people. While we would continue to reduce non-personnel expenses in FY26, most of the potential savings of these actions will be realized in FY25. Further, non-personnel reductions will not be sufficient to cover the shortfall of a flat budget. Thus, a flat FY26 budget means a significantly smaller GAO workforce.

A smaller GAO workforce means less capacity to support Congress. With fewer staff, we would prioritize congressional mandates to help ensure their completion by the required dates. This means we would likely stop work on congressional requests and shift those staff resources to mandated work. As a result, committee Chairs and Ranking Members will have to wait much longer before we could begin their requests for work. We would also need to dramatically scale back our technical assistance to committees and member offices, which is an in-demand and valuable service. In FY24 alone, we provided over 1,100 instances of technical assistance.

A reduction in services and capacity would come at a time when Congress most needs GAO. Congress is confronting difficult policy and programmatic decisions, ranging from the fiscal health of the nation to the benefits and risks associated with the exponential growth of artificial intelligence to evolving global security concerns. Congress needs reliable, fact-based, nonpartisan information to make these decisions. Further, as our record demonstrates, our work improves government efficiency and effectiveness, identifies ways to root out fraud, waste, and abuse, and saves taxpayer dollars. To deliver these results for the public, there is no better investment that Congress can make than ensuring a strong GAO.

Rep. Moore

In the hearing, you characterized the opinion issued on March 6th, 2025, titled Observations regarding the Environmental Protection Agency’s Submission of Notices of Decision on Clean Air Act Preemption Waivers as Rules Under the Congressional Review Act as simply providing “legal views on prior decisions.” However, the March 6th opinion states: “the analysis and conclusions in our 2023 Clean Air Act preemption waiver decision would also apply to the Notices of Decision recently submitted as rules to Congress by EPA.”

1. How was GAO able to fully review the massive impacts of the CAA waiver in order to determine the analysis would be identical in such a short time?

We were able to quickly issue the March 6 letter because it is a summary of existing caselaw. It is not a new legal decision. Rather we summarized relevant, existing caselaw in response to a congressional request. This is analogous to when we are asked to testify before a congressional committee. Because our testimony statements are typically based on published GAO work, we can deliver our statements to the congressional committees within a few days or weeks of being asked to testify. Summarizing published work is a quick task. The heavy lift—that requires significant time and resources—is the original audit and legal work that we conducted for the published GAO work. Indeed, the original 2023 legal decision on the EPA waivers took us 18 months to complete because of the complexity of the issues.

We reiterate that GAO provided the letter in response to a congressional request based on our responsibilities to respond to requests from Members on legal matters as well as our responsibilities under CRA. We did not take into account nor issue the letter on the basis of any political reason or outcome. We followed our standard practices and conducted our work in the same nonpartisan, fact-based, professional manner that we do for all legal products.

We determined that even though we would not issue a decision, given the fact that we had prior relevant caselaw, we could respond to the congressional request by summarizing caselaw with GAO’s views and analysis of preemption waivers under the Clean Air Act. We reviewed the analysis of our earlier decision, B-334309, Nov. 30, 2023, concluding that a Clean Air Act preemption waiver notice was not a rule for purposes of the CRA and determined that there had not been any changes in the legal analysis or caselaw since 2023.

In preparing our summary, we also sought EPA views, consistent with normal practice and importantly because of the contradictions in the Administration’s CRA submissions. Specifically, on February 19, 2025, EPA submitted three, previously issued notices of decision on announcing these waivers to GAO and Congress, which puts the notices before Congress as rules under the CRA. However, all three submitted notices stated that the waivers were orders and therefore not subject to CRA. On February 20, 2025, consistent with GAO’s normal practice of requesting clarification when an agency’s CRA report materially differs from what is stated in the submitted action, we reached out to EPA for clarification. EPA did not respond to our request for clarification. But the agency resubmitted the notices of decision to GAO on February

27, 2025. The resubmission noted that the waivers were being resubmitted as non-major rules; however, the resubmission did not change the published notices. That is, the underlying documentation of the resubmission continued to state the CRA did not apply to the waivers.

We summarized the analysis and conclusion of our 2023 decision. Then, we noted that the conclusions in that 2023 decision apply to the three Notices of Decision at issue because all three notices involved waivers granted to California under the same authority and process. Given the limited scope of the letter and because we have previously reviewed this caselaw, we were able to issue it more quickly than a formal CRA legal decision.

2. What is the average response time to members of Congress for GAO inquiries? Please provide both the average response time for Congressional Review Act related inquiries, and, separately, the average response time for non CRA related inquiries.

Most of our legal products are formal legal decisions, and as explained in the responses above, the March 6 letter was not a legal decision but rather a summary of existing CRA caselaw.

Given that the March 6 letter simply summarizes existing caselaw, we were able to issue it more quickly than a formal CRA legal decision. In terms of CRA decisions, last year we set an internal goal of issuing original, legal decisions within 120 days of accepting a request. Since adopting that practice, we have issued decisions, on average, within 115 days of accepting a request. For non-CRA-related inquiries, we have issued decisions on a range of appropriations law matters at the request of executive agencies and Inspector Generals. Issuance timeframes depend on a number of factors such as complexity and information provided by agencies in response to our development letters. For the 7 decisions requested in 2023 and 2024, we issued them on an average of 236 days. Again, these timeframes reflect the entirety of the process of conducting original legal analyses and making determinations, which was not the case for the March 6 letter.

3. Please provide all internal documents and communications between and among GAO employees on this issue.

The documents and information you requested have been provided separately, these are sensitive and deliberative documents, many of which are covered by the attorney work product and/or attorney client privilege. Therefore, we ask that they are treated confidentially.

4. Did any employees at the GAO have any communications related to the March 6th opinion with members of the media or an intermediary between them and the media before, during, or after the release of the opinion? If so, please provide those communications.

GAO had one communication with the media related to the March 6 letter prior to issuance. On March 3, a reporter contacted us to ask whether the three CAA waivers at issue in the March 6 letter were going to be included in GAO's Rules Database. The database contains all rules submitted to GAO pursuant to the Congressional Review Act. We responded that we had not yet determined whether the CAA waivers would be included in the database. On March 3, the reporter sent follow-up questions, including whether including the waivers in the database would make them subject to CRA. We responded that including actions in the database is not determinative as to whether actions are rules subject to CRA. Following issuance of the letter on March 6, we forwarded a copy of the letter and the accompanying prepared press statement to that reporter. See attached.

5. Have you or any employees at the GAO had any communication with the Senate Parliamentarian or her staff on this issue? If so, what was the substance, context, and nature of such communications?

No, neither I nor any GAO employees have had any communication with the Senate Parliamentarian or her staff on this issue.

6. Have you or any employees at the GAO had communications with the Senate Parliamentarian or her staff on issues related to the Congressional Review Act since January 20, 2017? If so, what was the substance, context, and nature of such communications? Please provide specific examples.

Yes, we have had two communications with the Senate Parliamentarian on issues related to the Congressional Review Act since January 20, 2017. The first communication was on March 18, 2020, where GAO's Managing Associate General Counsel for Appropriations Law informed the Parliamentarian of a notice that would be transmitted to agencies, explaining that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, GAO would only receive electronic submissions of rules under CRA. The second communication was on July 31, 2024, where an Assistant General Counsel informed the Parliamentarian of changes made to GAO's CRA submission form, and asked whether the Parliamentarian would accept the new form.

7. Can you provide additional context on the opinion and clarify that it is not binding on the Senate's ability to exercise oversight of administrative actions under the Congressional Review Act?

GAO issues legal decisions to Congress on a wide array of matters, including appropriations law issues and compliance with CRA and Federal Vacancies Reform Act (FVRA). GAO also renders legal decisions to committees of Congress on matters within their jurisdiction and to individual members of Congress. If GAO determines not to issue a legal decision in response to a particular request, we may instead send a letter to the requester that discusses our previous

decisions and provides observations. In addition to responding to requests for legal decisions and analysis, GAO also provides informal technical assistance to Congress on issues upon which the attorneys have developed a particular competence and GAO has done prior work. Informal technical assistance may include explaining the law, the rationale behind a prior legal decision, or a legal position taken in a GAO audit report.

Specifically with regard to the CRA, GAO's role and practice has been to provide legal decisions and assistance to Congress on the requirements of the statute. GAO's role does not extend, nor do we take a position with respect to the decisions made by the Parliamentarians or Congress with respect to the consideration of matters under the CRA. In this situation, we followed that practice and did not have any discussions with the Parliamentarians, nor suggest that GAO's views should substitute for those of the House or the Senate. GAO's legal decisions are advisory and therefore are nonbinding; they serve to assist the Congress in its constitutional responsibilities. Furthermore, GAO does not have enforcement authority with respect to actions taken by executive branch agencies. Finally, it is important to note GAO's role is procedural—to help ensure compliance with the statute—and is not to be interpreted as taking a position on the underlying policies entailed.

House Appropriations Legislative Branch Subcommittee

Questions for the Record

Government Publishing Office (GPO)

Hon. Hugh Nathaniel Halpern

FY2026

Chairman Valadao

1. I understand that in some instances GPO requires highly specialized editors who must ensure the proper layout of congressionally enacted legislation. Will AI be able to assist you in this process and enable you to reduce the need for these kinds of highly trained and specialized employees?

We hope that this technology will be helpful in the future. At the moment, we are still looking at potential solutions and have not yet found anything that will yield significant improvements.

We believe that large-language models and related AI technologies hold promise for improving the productivity and efficiency of GPO operations in several key areas, including our proofroom where highly trained, professionals perform a number of time-consuming, exacting tasks during the production of critical congressional documents. We cannot yet see the current or near-term versions of this technology replacing our proofreaders, but we think it may eventually address simple issues, freeing our proofreaders to address more difficult problems.

GPO's dedicated team of proofreaders and keyboard operators are the backbone of GPO's in-plant operations. Without them, we wouldn't be able to deliver final products for Congress or the Federal Register. They are also difficult to hire. It takes a particular type of person with the dedication to perform this important but exacting, repetitive work, usually at night. In the past we had been able to recruit from the newspaper and publishing industries, but today there are fewer and fewer proofreaders employed by those industries.

While GPO is trying to grow the next generation of proofreaders through its apprentice program, it is slow going. Having more intelligent tools to supplement their work will help to make these teammates more productive and let them focus on more complicated problems. For instance, currently we use simple "find and replace" scripts to address common capitalization issues. One element of GPO style is capitalizing the word "State" when referring to a political subdivision. However, these scripts can't discern between the "State of Minnesota" and a "New York state of mind." That requires our proofreaders to go back and make sure that the words are capitalized in context.

AI holds the potential of delivering more intelligent tools that would be able to understand that context, learn as our proofreaders correct copy according to natural changes in language, and reduce the routine work our proofreaders need to do to prepare a manuscript. This will free our team to focus on more complex problems, like formatting of bills or making sure that references are correct. That would be a major improvement for our teammates and our workflow.

These problems are exacerbated by the fundamental nature of legislative drafting. For instance, the House and Senate use multiple different drafting styles (including one unique to appropriations work) and there

are often multiple styles in a single document, depending on the content or form of amendment. We haven't yet found an automated tool that can accurately determine which style should be used when and still check for basic grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

While GPO is not currently in possession of an AI tool that would help achieve these outcomes for our proofroom, we are aggressively investigating the potential opportunities AI presents for the future. Working closely with Senate Rules & Administration, the Joint Committee on Printing, and the Committee on House Administration, GPO has taken a deliberate approach to the potential represented by AI and similar technologies. First, we created a use-case inventory similar in spirit and scope to those required of executive branch agencies and made that inventory public on our website. This provides a level of awareness, accountability, and transparency, ensuring that we fully think through these kinds of technologies before we deploy them.

Second, we developed an AI policy consistent with relevant statute as well as best practices such as those described in the March 2023 NIST AI Risk Management Framework. GPO's AI policy was issued in October of 2023 and stipulates that the use of AI at GPO must comport with our four Agency values—honesty, kindness, effectiveness, and inclusiveness—and enhance efficiency, increase productivity, and promote safety. It also requires that use of AI capabilities be disclosed to GPO employees, contractors, and clients and that requests for the use of new AI applications be submitted for review and approval to GPO's Technical Change Control Board (TCCB), which evaluates any new application or software that GPO teammates seek to use.

The policy also called for the creation of an AI Governance Committee at GPO comprised of key business unit managers as well as for the training of every GPO employee who may be entrusted with using AI capabilities. We believe this emphasis on training will prove critically important in the years ahead because we need to ensure such tools are used in a responsible and ethical manner. Our AI Governance Committee was stood up in the Spring of 2024, and our overall AI Strategy was completed in the summer of 2024.

We are currently undertaking several AI-related pilot projects, and have identified four priority areas within GPO where we would like to bring the AI technologies to bear in the near term with productivity improvements in our proofroom being one of the four priority areas. The other three are administrative function efficiency improvements with an initial focus on our acquisitions policies and procedures; our cybersecurity monitoring and threat detection activities; and enhancements to the quality assurance practices employed in our manufacturing processes.

Lastly, we are in the process of deploying components of our XPub composition system in our proofroom sooner than originally planned to help us address the high-volume processing of introduced legislative measures. These tools use machine learning to parse XML structure of electronic legislative files to cut down on composition errors. We expect to deploy those tools in the next 90-days.

Ranking Member Espallat

1. How will the Government Publishing Office (GPO) be impacted by the recent change in tariff policies? Please explain any current or potential impacts in detail including how GPO plans to adjust for additional expenses.

While it is too soon to assess the magnitude of new tariffs, GPO believes there are three main areas where we are likely to feel their impacts. The first is financial. We are just starting to see tariff charges

applied to overseas purchases so it may take a few months to assess how GPO's finances will be impacted. GPO is required by statute to recover its costs through the prices we charge our Federal agency customers, so if import tariff costs should increase our operational costs significantly in the months ahead, GPO will need to increase the cost of the goods and services we provide to cover such costs.

One such example would be on the passports we produce for the State Department. Passports, and their many security features, are designed jointly by State and GPO. Many of the materials are manufactured overseas as their technology represents the state-of-the-art. Additionally, the equipment to be used in the Series B passport (next passport iteration) are being manufactured outside of the U.S. Title 44 requires that the Business Operations Revolving Fund (the funding source GPO uses to produce the passports) be reimbursed for costs. Therefore, GPO will be obligated to incorporate tariff costs on both materials and equipment into the passport price charged to State for blank books we produce.

The second way tariffs are likely to impact GPO is in adding some administrative work to our acquisitions process to ensure that we are in compliance with U.S. law; that vendors are charging in tariffs in an appropriate way; and that any fees we incur related to tariffs are truly the result of the tariffs. We need to ensure that we remain good stewards of public funds.

To assist our contracting officers with these challenges, our Agency Acquisitions team has developed a Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) background document to explain GPO's tariff related obligations. Specifically, going forward, GPO will require our contracting officers to validate any proposed tariff fee or surcharge and determine if it is fair and reasonable and to ensure such charges do not include any freight, shipping, or unrelated charges. The FAQ stipulates that applicable tariff fees and surcharges can be validated using the "New Tariff Requirements for 2025" provided by the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) official Government website, <https://www.cbp.gov> (see attachment).

Lastly, GPO is concerned that these changes could lead to supply chain issues as our suppliers face challenges with complying with tariff changes and delay shipment. GPO may need to stockpile certain materials or supplies to ensure that we can maintain our manufacturing cadence.

2. Please explain the impact of the full-year continuing resolution on your current budget and how it affects your requests for fiscal year 2026.

The Fiscal Year 2025 appropriation delay for the Public Information Programs (PIP) Salaries & Expenses account, through which GPO funds the administration of the Federal Depository Library Program, generated uncertainty and hesitancy in committing funds for the year and going forward, primarily in hiring staff up to budget levels. The inability to hire staff has impacted PIP's efforts to transition from traditional print to more efficient and permanently accessible digital content.

As you are aware, some of the expenses of this program, and most of the GPO Congressional Publishing account expenditures are driven by publishing legislative materials. At the current time, it appears that the requirements for congressional publishing may be less than originally anticipated for fiscal year 2025, but fiscal year 2026 could see publishing requirements increase. Should the committee need to reduce GPO's appropriations request, we respectfully ask for the opportunity to recommend account-level changes to minimize the impact on our operations.

3. In addition, please detail which services to Congress will be impacted if your budgets remain frozen through fiscal year 2026.

GPO will request that unexpended fiscal year 2020 appropriated balances be transferred into the no-year Business Operations Revolving Fund in order to cushion the fund in case the publishing requirements increase in Fiscal Year 2026. The transfer funds would be used only if necessary for authorized activities.

Congressional Budget Office
Nonpartisan Analysis for the U.S. Congress



**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS
FOR THE RECORD**

Following a Hearing on
**CBO's Request for Appropriations
for Fiscal Year 2026**

Conducted by the
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

MAY 16 | 2025

On April 9, 2025, the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch of the House Committee on Appropriations convened a hearing at which Phillip L. Swagel, the Congressional Budget Office's Director, testified about the agency's appropriation request for fiscal year 2026.¹ After the hearing, Chairman David Valadao, Ranking Member Adriano Espaillat, and Vice Chair Riley Moore submitted questions for the record. This document provides CBO's answers. It is available at www.cbo.gov/publication/61406.

Chairman Valadao

Question. You note that 48 percent of your budget request (\$2.8 million), if fully funded, would go toward enhancing your cybersecurity and IT infrastructure. Do you anticipate these levels to be recurring annual costs or onetime costs that we could see at lower levels over time for maintaining these enhancements?

Answer. CBO is requesting a \$2.8 million increase in nonpersonnel costs to support a combination of onetime and recurring investments in cybersecurity and information technology (IT) infrastructure and operations that are essential components for protecting sensitive data and enabling advanced data analysis capabilities. The portion of the funding for cybersecurity is aligned with the agency's strategic priority of implementing what is termed a zero-trust security architecture, which requires identity and device verification before granting access to network systems or data.

About one-third of the requested increase, or roughly \$900,000, is for onetime costs for IT infrastructure, including high-speed network hardware such as switches, routers, and firewalls, as well as document management software. Those items will ensure the reliability and scalability of CBO's network and will enhance work processes and improve records management and compliance with related requirements.

The remaining two-thirds, or approximately \$1.9 million, is for recurring costs for infrastructure and operations, including expanded cloud storage, high-speed Internet service, and key cybersecurity tools

(such as ThousandEyes for network visibility, Check Point security licenses, Cisco Secure Network Analytics [formerly Stealthwatch], and iBoss Cloud Security). Those tools are necessary to monitor, detect, and prevent cybersecurity threats in real time. The increase in recurring costs reflects a mix of increased usage by employees and higher costs for services and tools.

Altogether, the \$2.8 million increase reflects a proactive approach toward cybersecurity and IT modernization and is necessary to maintain the integrity, security, and performance of the agency's operations.

Question. We know the impact that a CBO score can have on a bill's ability to become law. Please describe how you support the Appropriations Committee as we develop bills to bring to the floor?

Answer. CBO works for all Congressional committees, and the Appropriations Committees receive priority. CBO is committed to supporting the Appropriations Committees throughout the legislative process.

The agency provides data and information as the Appropriations Committees consider both annual appropriation bills and supplemental appropriation bills, in addition to distributing reports to interested parties within the Congress that break down account-level details of the budgetary effects of proposed appropriation legislation. CBO's cost estimates of appropriation bills show the budget authority and outlays that would result if the legislation was enacted. (That information takes a different form in the cost estimates that the agency is required by law to prepare for authorizing bills.)

CBO's detailed reports for annual appropriation bills show estimates of the discretionary budget authority and outlays that would occur in that year, including the estimated budgetary effects of provisions that make changes in mandatory programs. Separately, CBO provides a tabulation of the budgetary effects of those changes for each of the next 10 years. In addition, for appropriation bills that are ordered reported by a committee, the agency provides an estimate of the outlays resulting over the next 5 years from the budget authority provided in such bills.

The details of the budgetary effects are presented on CBO's "Status of Appropriations" page on the agency's website. In addition, the agency publishes a report early

1. See the testimony of Phillip L. Swagel, Director, Congressional Budget Office, before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch of the House Committee on Appropriations, *The Congressional Budget Office's Request for Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2026* (April 9, 2025), www.cbo.gov/publication/61287.

each year that tracks authorizations of appropriations that have specified expiration dates and identifies appropriations that are provided for authorizations that have expired or that will expire by the end of the current fiscal year.

Similarly, CBO's detailed reports for supplemental appropriation bills also provide information detailing the estimated budget authority and outlays in the current year and for the next 10 years. In addition, the agency regularly updates historical information about supplemental appropriations and makes those updates available on its website.

Question. In your testimony, you highlight the work that CBO is doing now in providing technical assistance to Members in addition to its scoring of major legislation. How do you decide when to support Members with technical assistance and when to develop a full score, and how does this work affect the workload of your staff?

Answer. One of CBO's most important objectives is to review each piece of legislation ahead of consideration on the floor. The agency is required by law to produce a cost estimate once an authorizing committee orders a bill to be reported for consideration by the full House or Senate.

In addition, CBO fulfills numerous requests for technical assistance as committees are crafting legislation, as amendments to bills are being debated, and at other stages in the legislative process. The agency's analysts often provide preliminary estimates to committee staff, helping them weigh different options for achieving legislative goals.

CBO recognizes that Members of Congress who are not Chairs or Ranking Members of committees want more analysis from the agency, and CBO's analysts offer as much service as possible as time allows. The agency aims to be as responsive and timely as possible, while facing intense demand and strained resources in many areas.

Technical assistance for Members can take many forms, depending on the complexity of the bill, what other legislation is being considered at the time, and whether the information is necessary for budget enforcement. The information CBO provides can be a range of numbers, a point estimate, a determination of whether the bill would increase direct spending or revenues, or an explanation of key levers determining the budgetary effects.

For example, CBO reviews proposed amendments to legislation and assesses for each whether the amendment

would affect direct spending or revenues, as that information is needed for budget enforcement. The agency's analysis of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 is an example. CBO reviewed 3,563 amendments and provided such feedback. Of those amendments, 752 were reviewed when the bill was being considered by the House Armed Services Committee, 1,778 (submitted by 353 Members of the House) were reviewed before the bill was considered on the House floor, and 1,033 (submitted by 94 Senators) were reviewed before consideration on the Senate floor.

In some instances, CBO can and does provide more robust information (usually by phone or email) than the examples mentioned if, for instance, a bill is similar to legislation the agency has reviewed in the past.

Ranking Member Espaillet

Question. Across the Legislative Branch, many requested increases have been compounded due to a failure to complete the 2025 appropriations process. Please explain the impact of the full-year continuing resolution on your current budget and how it affects your requests for fiscal year 2026. In addition, please detail which services to Congress will be impacted if your budgets remain frozen through fiscal year 2026.

Answer. In 2025, under a full-year continuing resolution, CBO will maintain its staffing at about 270 employees, although as described in the agency's budget requests for this year and next, it believes it needs 285 employees to better meet its responsibilities under the Congressional Budget Act. Under the full-year continuing resolution, CBO is focusing on the highest-priority current needs, including preparing cost estimates, providing technical assistance as legislation is developed, and analyzing the economic and dynamic budgetary effects of proposed policies.

CBO is reducing expenditures elsewhere, by deferring hiring for some positions and deferring some activities, including not undertaking some longer-term improvements in its IT infrastructure. Some of the deferred activities for IT are included in the request for 2026 (as discussed in the answer to a question from Chairman Valadao above). Also, CBO is undertaking incremental funding for some services this year, even though doing so means that the agency is unable to take advantage of annual contracts with lower costs.

Operating at its fiscal year 2025 level in fiscal year 2026 would cause the agency to shrink, diminishing CBO's effectiveness. CBO would be unable to fill positions for staff who leave and would forgo adding analysts in areas of intense Congressional interest, including immigration and border security, dynamic policy effects, and health care. Such a reduction in staffing and forgone staffing would result in an uneven mix of skills and potential gaps in the agency's responsiveness to the Congress in producing cost estimates and reports and providing technical assistance. Extending this year's level of funding to next year would also preclude improvements in CBO's cybersecurity and IT infrastructure that the agency believes are necessary.

Vice Chair Moore

Question. My understanding is that CBO is currently reviewing the budgetary impact of "severance" or royalty tax on coal on federal land. I know there are concerns that cutting the royalty tax would potentially decrease the revenue intake. As CBO assesses this, I encourage you to look at the State of West Virginia. We did this while I was the state treasurer. There was an initial decrease in intake, but in the out-years we saw a substantial increase. Decreasing tax liability freed up capital for companies to open additional mines and resulted in a production increase.

Will you commit to ensuring the example of West Virginia is reviewed in any analysis CBO produces on this issue?

Answer. Yes.

PUBLIC WITNESS DAY

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF SALARIES

WITNESS

OMAR AWAN, FOUNDER, HILLCLIMBERS.ORG

Mr. VALADAO. This subcommittee will come to order.

This is the fiscal year 2026 Legislative Branch Subcommittee Public Witness Day hearing.

I would like to thank Ranking Member Espaillat and committee members for being here today.

A special thank you to our witnesses for being here today. We appreciate your interest in the legislative branch and for taking time out of your busy schedules to testify before this subcommittee.

In addition to our witnesses here this morning, additional witnesses have submitted testimony for the record, and their statements may be found online.

[The information follows:]



Written Testimony of Sens. Heidi Heitkamp and Mel Martinez
Co-Chairs, Bipartisan Policy Center Working Group on Congress, Courts, and
Administrative Law

Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch:
Member Day and Public Witness Day

April 9, 2025

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and members of the House Appropriations Legislative Branch Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We had the privilege of serving in the U.S. Senate: Florida, 2005-09 (Martinez), and North Dakota, 2013-2019 (Heitkamp). We both witnessed how Congress can work at its best and how it can devolve into dysfunction. Insufficient resources for the legislative branch underpin many cases in which Congress has fallen short. Drawing on our public service experience, we recently co-chaired the Working Group on Congress, Courts, and Administrative Law convened by the Bipartisan Policy Center.¹ We encourage you to consider providing sufficient funding for congressional committees, the House Office of Legislative Counsel, and legislative branch support agencies.

Working Group on Congress, Courts, and Administrative Law

BPC established this working group in September 2024 in response to the Supreme Court decision in *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, which overturned what was known as “Chevron deference.” Under this 40-year judicial doctrine, federal courts had significant leeway in deferring to regulatory agencies’ interpretations of statutes. In *Loper Bright*, the court ruled that statutes have a single best meaning rather than multiple interpretations. Regulatory

¹ <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/congress-courts-administrative-law-working-group/>

agencies can no longer rely on implied delegations expressed in vague, ambiguous language as a basis for interpretation and implementation.

That decision came only two years after a series of court decisions striking down agency actions based on the major questions doctrine.² According to this, agencies cannot act on matters of great social, economic, or political significance without unambiguous delegations of authority from Congress.

To examine these decisions and their implications for Congress, BPC convened the working group of former elected officials, congressional staff, regulators, and other experts. The working group concluded that Congress needs to account for these rulings in three main areas: delegation to agencies, statutory interpretation by agencies and courts, and what deference is or is not given by courts. Each implicates the legislative process and congressional capacity. Congress must improve the quality of the legislation it drafts and increase its own knowledge about how agencies and courts interpret laws.

The working group released its report and recommendations in March 2025.³ Because the working group found that the burden of accounting for the Supreme Court's decisions will fall heavily on committee staff, the House Office of Legislative Counsel (HOLC), and legislative branch support agencies, several recommendations pertain to these entities.

Expand Committee Resources

Congressional committees are the principal vehicle for examining problems, developing solutions, and refining legislation. In the wake of *Loper Bright* and the major

² Most prominently, *West Virginia v. EPA*, 579 U.S. 697 (2022).

³ Bipartisan Policy Center, "Legislating After *Loper*: Practical Solutions for a Post-Chevron Congress," March 2025, at: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/final-report-and-recommendations/>.



questions doctrine cases, these activities will only grow more critical. Over time, however, committee staffing and funding have declined. Congress cannot improve the legislative process—expressing delegations more clearly and improving directions provided to agencies—without adequate committee resources.

The working group recommends more funding to expand the hiring of policy and legal staff on committees. It also recommends additional funding to allow committees to hire temporary expert staff when needed for particularly complex or time-sensitive topics.

Additionally, committees will need an improved understanding of constitutional and legal issues that specific bills may present. In conversations with current and former Hill staff, the working group heard that members and staff are often unaware of such issues regarding their legislation. The working group determined that personal offices and committees need capacity to identify and understand these issues rather than relying solely on the input of other entities such as HOLC. As discussed below, HOLC capacity is already strained. Modeled on the House Chief Administrative Officer's Coach program—which by many accounts has been successful and well received—the working group suggests the creation of new liaison positions. Ideally filled by former committee counsels, these positions would work with personal office and committee staff to improve legislative drafting and help them anticipate and address legal and constitutional issues.

Ensure Adequate Capacity at House Office of Legislative Counsel

Demand for HOLC services continues to grow. As this subcommittee has heard on previous occasions, staffing needs have not kept pace with the increasing number of member requests, as well as bills, amendments, and resolutions drafted by HOLC. One important



consequence of *Loper Bright* is that, since there is a single best meaning of statutes, legislative language must be as straightforward as possible and incorporate more information regarding congressional purposes and goals.

The working group encourages this subcommittee to ensure that HOLC staffing is commensurate with rising demand. The working group also recommends that the subcommittee consider new resources for HOLC dedicated explicitly to reviewing legislative drafts for clear language regarding delegations of authority and expressions of purpose.

Provide Sufficient Resources to Legislative Branch Support Agencies

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) and Government Accountability Office (GAO) are essential to helping Congress do its job well. Yet staffing levels at these two agencies have fallen over the last 30 years. The working group identified two areas requiring additional work, particularly from CRS. First, we recommend that the subcommittee use report language to instruct CRS to regularly summarize and disseminate an overview of commonly used “canons of construction.” These interpretive judicial doctrines often shape how congressionally enacted statutes are implemented. Congress must take stronger consideration of them during the legislative drafting process, which requires additional resources. Second, we recommend that the subcommittee use report language to instruct CRS to create a tracking list of judicial decisions that find violations of the major questions doctrine.

Congress needs more information about how its statutes are interpreted and implemented, especially by courts. CRS currently produces some of this information, yet recent Supreme Court decisions necessitate even more—and more frequent—production of



such information. We recommend that this subcommittee ensure CRS (and GAO, as needed) have the requisite resources to keep members and staff well informed on judicial decisions and statutory interpretations.

We're grateful for this subcommittee's support of the legislative branch and attention to areas of need. Congress must invest in itself to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities, starting with the most basic input: people. Expectations of the legislative branch will only increase in the wake of *Loper Bright* and major questions cases. To meet those expectations and ensure capacity keeps pace with demand for congressional attention, we encourage this subcommittee to confidently and boldly assert the need for additional staffing resources across committees, HOLC, and support agencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. More information can be found in the recent [BPC report](#). The Working Group on Congress, Courts, and Administrative Law and BPC's policy experts stand ready to further support you in these efforts.



Heidi Heitkamp
U.S. Senator (D-ND), 2013-2019



Mel Martinez
U.S. Senator (R-FL), 2005-2009



Mr. VALADAO. I would also like to note that this hearing serves as a vehicle for one Member of Congress who submitted testimony for the record, and her statement can also be found online.
[The information follows:]

To: Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee

Date: Friday, April 4, 2025

From: The Honorable Sylvia R. Garcia (D-TX-29)

Re: Member Testimony for Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee Member Day

Thank you, Mr. Chair, Ranking Member, and Committee Members, for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee as part of today's Member Day.

This is an important opportunity for Members of the House of Representatives to advocate for their constituents, share their priorities, and help shape the appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2025.

Over the last several years, Congress has taken decisive action to ensure that Congress and all levels of government better reflect our nation's diversity – building pathways of opportunity for America's next generation of leaders.

The Subcommittee should build on this critical work by including language in the Legislative Branch appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2026 that expands federal employment requirements to include recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

As you know, the DACA program was established in 2012 to protect eligible immigrants who came to the United States when they were children from deportation. The program also provides recipients with work authorizations, allowing them to be legally employed in the U.S.

DACA recipients make immeasurable contributions to our communities – paying billions in federal and state taxes each year.

DACA recipients are Americans in every way and influence all sectors of our society. These young men and women serve in uniform, teach our children, start businesses on Main Streets across the country, and contribute to the fabric of our communities in every conceivable way.

DACA recipients occupy roles and are pursuing degrees in critical industries that influence government policy and operations, including tech, finance, health care, education, environment, and law.

Dreamers support America, and now America needs to support Dreamers.

Just as DACA recipients are already making a positive difference across the country, they are positioned to make significant contributions to the federal workforce. Yet, despite having work authorizations, they are inexplicably and unfairly barred from serving in the federal workforce.

DACA recipients have been serving as federal interns and fellows through third-party entities, contributing diverse experience and expertise to the work of the federal government, but have no avenue for permanent federal employment.

Historically, appropriations legislation has routinely prohibited the federal government from hiring non-citizens.

It is time that Congress finally eliminated this unnecessary and unfair barrier that keeps DACA recipients from seeking federal employment. This would give thousands of DACA recipients across the nation, including more than 95,000 in my home state of Texas, the opportunity to continue contributing to the United States, the only country they call home. Congress, and the federal government more broadly, would benefit greatly from the contributions of DACA recipients.

In addition to this critical priority, the Subcommittee should provide adequate funding to support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in Congress.

Until recently, the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), a non-partisan and non-legislative support office, was responsible for addressing the state of underrepresentation in the Congressional workforce.

Since its inception in the 116th Congress, the ODI has assisted approximately 2,678 job seekers and conducted over 1,526 consultations with employing offices. The office referred over 6,441

resumes to hiring managers and helped approximately 730 job seekers land congressional careers.

Further, ODI's research initiatives and surveys shed critical light on the state of workforce representation, compensation, benefits, and demographic makeup of the U.S. House of Representatives workforce, which guided actions taken by Congress to make it a more representative, fair, and equitable place to work.

Despite ODI's strong record of service to members regardless of political affiliation, some Republicans eager to score cheap political points in their crusade against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives worked to eliminate ODI in its entirety as part of the Fiscal Year 2024 Legislative Branch appropriations bill.

While non-partisan staff and critical functions of ODI were ultimately protected and moved to be housed under the Chief Administrative Officer, it is clear that the ODI operated at its best when it was fully dedicated to advancing equity for our Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and LGBTQ+ communities, along with other underserved communities, including women, veterans, and individuals with disabilities.

I, therefore, request that the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee work on a bipartisan basis to restore the existence and robust funding of the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion in the 119th Congress and beyond. We must ensure that Congress better reflects the diversity and lived experiences of our constituents.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share these priorities for your consideration, and I encourage all members of the subcommittee to work with me to get this done.

Thank you.

STATEMENT OF OMAR AWAN

Mr. AWAN. Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to testify.

As you know, actual staff salaries vary between offices and account for about three-fourths of a Member's budget, but each Member is provided the same amount. It is known as the "clerk-hire" component of the MRAs.

If we want to stop the revolving door that is straining institutional knowledge and undercuts legislative and constituent services, we have to align MRAs with real-world staffing costs.

Before I retired from the House, I was asked to set all 441 bespoke Member budgets in just 3 months for the incoming 111th Congress. It was then that I learned that the clerk-hire was set as \$944,000 back in 2010. And I couldn't find any kind of supporting analysis for where that number came from. It was marginally increased to \$994,000 in 2020.

I knew we could do better as an institution when it was my job to set those MRAs in 2023, so I conducted a comprehensive salary analysis that categorized thousands of unique job titles into the typical roles found in a Member office. I accounted for staff that wear multiple hats, and I also made sure that shared staff didn't skew the numbers downwards.

This led to the first meaningful increase in the clerk-hire in more than a decade, from \$994,000 to \$1.434 million for every single Member office.

Even with that increase, turnover in 2023 was still high—over 60 percent among leg. assistants and over 70 percent among leg. correspondents.

Since salaries continue to rise with inflation and market demands, Members are increasingly basically robbing Peter to pay Paul just to maintain competitive pay. They buy less supplies and equipment, they send less official mail, or, worse, they hire less staff so that they can adequately pay the staff that they have.

In February, I launched HillClimbers.org. It is an online platform that transforms House SOD data into salary and staffing insights for Member offices. Our newest data shows that the average Member office will spend more than \$1.5 million this year on salaries and \$1.55 million by 2026.

I have two recommendations.

First, I think we need to get the horse before the cart. In February, appropriators, they set the overall MRA budget, and they will come up with a number. And then at the end of the year, CHA, whose job it is to set the individual MRAs, they have to reverse-engineer all the individual MRAs to fit within that budget that was set in February.

So, you know, basically, that process is not working. MRAs have been held flat since 2023 when I set all the MRAs for the last 2 years because of this process.

I think that CHA and the appropriators should work closely together in February to figure out, using real data, which HillClimbers can provide, to set an overall MRA budget that actually reflects the actual, you know, needs of Members and the market demands. Then in October, CHA can set those individual

MRAs, and when they do that, they will line up with the number that was set in February if we do this correctly.

I proved in 2023 that it is possible to use math, science, and data to build extremely accurate MRA budgets and not have to reverse-engineer them from a number.

Second, we need to improve the SOD data set.

One of the first things we have to do—and Daniel Schuman agrees with me on this, as well—is to add unique identifiers to the data set. We need to have a number that we can use to track people when they get married and change their last names or in the data set there are mistakes with the names. We need to be able to know who that person is.

Second, we need to also have a field that tells us whether they are permanent or nonpermanent staff so that we can figure out, according to the 18/4 framework, whether Member offices are staffed to their potential or not.

Staff salaries are essential for recruiting and retaining talented professionals. And thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. VALADAO. I appreciate that, Mr. Awan.

[The information follows:]

TESTIMONY OF OMAR AWAN



Founder, HillClimbers.org
Before the House Appropriations Committee,
Legislative Branch Subcommittee
Public Witness Testimony – FY 2026 Member Day Hearing

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the importance of further strengthening the Clerk Hire component of the Member's Representational Allowance (MRA).

As the former Director of Strategy for the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of the U.S. House of Representatives, I was responsible for determining, analyzing, and setting MRA levels for all 441 House offices in the 118th Congress. In 2023, I conducted a comprehensive salary analysis that led to the first meaningful increase in Clerk Hire funding in over a decade, raising it from **\$994,000 to \$1,434,751 per Member Office**.

This testimony builds upon that work, utilizing the latest compensation data from HillClimbers, a salary intelligence platform I recently founded to increase transparency in legislative staff pay.

The Importance of Competitive Compensation in Congress

The effectiveness of the U.S. House of Representatives depends on its ability to **attract and retain** top legislative talent. Yet, House staff salaries



have **lagged behind** private-sector and executive branch counterparts, contributing to **high turnover rates** and a loss of institutional knowledge.

- **Turnover remains alarmingly high**, particularly among **Legislative Assistants (over 60%)** and **Legislative Correspondents/ Aides (over 70%)** in recent years—both critical policy development roles.
- **Overall turnover**, excluding interns, has hovered near **70% since LY 2021** and the average years of House or Representatives experience for a staffer in 2024 was **4.0 years** based on data since 2009.
- **Staffing levels have slightly increased**, with daily average House staffing (excluding interns) rising from 7,229 staff in LY 2022 to 7,534 in LY 2024—an **additional 150 staff per year**.
- Due to turnover, **more than 12,000 individuals cycle through these positions annually**, leading to instability and inefficiencies.

The Need to Put the Horse Before the Cart

Congress took a necessary step in 2023 by raising the Clerk Hire component from \$994,000 to \$1.434 million per Member, a 44% increase driven by my **detailed salary analysis** that examined:

1. **All unique job titles**: categorizing thousands of variations into standard Member office roles (e.g., "LD," "Leg Director," and "Legislative Dir" all classified as "Legislative Director").



2. **Dual-role titles:** ensuring salaries of positions like Deputy CoS/Press Secretary were accounted for in both capacities.
3. **Shared staff:** distinguishing between (a) administrative staff shared among multiple Members and (b) staff working across Member and Leadership/Committee offices, **preventing data distortion.**

However, in early 2024, despite my analysis proving the need for an increase in the Clerk Hire, MRAs were left flat. In early 2023, the overall MRA budget was set too by appropriators, so it was too late. Instead of this “cart before the horse” approach, HillClimbers proposes a better method: CHA and appropriators work together early in the year using our data and expertise to formulate accurate legislative branch budgets.

Key Findings from HillClimbers' Analysis

Using a refined methodology with **publicly available Statements of Disbursements**, HillClimbers has re-evaluated actual Clerk Hire spending, confirming that average spending in LY 2023 aligned with the allocated amount using a similar staffing model to the 2023 salary analysis:

Year	Clerk Hire Allocation	Actual Average Spend	Difference
LY 2023	\$1,434,751	\$1,426,926	-\$7,825
LY 2024 (to 31 Dec)	\$1,434,751	\$1,474,082	+\$39,331
LY 2025 (Projected)	\$1,434,751	\$1,510,934	+\$76,183
LY 2026 (Projected)	\$1,434,751	\$1,548,707	+\$113,956



The **2024 numbers are not yet final** as year-end staff bonuses and pay for the last two days of Legislative Year 2024 will not be available until late May. Based on LY 2024 data to the end of the calendar year, projected **Clerk Hire spending in LY 2025 will likely exceed \$1.5 million per office.**

While MRA funding remained **flat in FY 2024**, actual Clerk Hire expenditures increased, meaning Members are again reallocating funds from **other MRA components** to compensate for rising salary costs.

Updated Recommendation for FY 2026

Appropriators should work with CHA and HillClimbers to base overall MRA budgets on real data early in the year. **HillClimbers projects the 2026**

Clerk Hire will need to be \$1.548 million per Member Office to:

- ✓ **Ensure market-aligned salaries**, reducing attrition to the private sector.
- ✓ **Strengthen retention**, preventing the loss of experienced staff.
- ✓ **Support legislative capacity**, to meet constituent and policy demands.

Impact of an Increased Clerk Hire Allowance

Strengthening Institutional Knowledge: High turnover erodes institutional memory, forcing Member offices to operate with **junior, less experienced staff**. Increasing the Clerk Hire allocation will allow Members to **retain mid-career professionals**, reducing reliance on short-term hires.



Reversing the "Stepping-Stone" Effect: The House has increasingly become a **training ground** for talent that moves on to **better-paying roles in the private sector** or **higher salaries in the Executive Branch**. A well-funded Clerk Hire allowance will:

- **Stabilize the workforce**, keeping skilled professionals in Congress.
- **Improve policy development**, reducing staff disruptions & departures.
- **Enhance constituent services**, ensuring every office has the resources to serve the American people effectively.

Conclusion & Recommendation

To maintain a **highly skilled, experienced, and stable workforce**, the House appropriators must change formulation processes to work with CHA when setting the overall MRA budget using Hillclimbers' robust data set. The House must **build on the progress made in FY 2023** with a **data-driven** approach that reflects **real-world salary trends**, ensuring Members have the resources to **hire, retain, and compensate their staff**—the professionals who keep Congress functioning.

I appreciate the Committee's commitment to strengthening the legislative workforce and welcome the opportunity to discuss these findings further.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Respectfully submitted,

Omar Awan - Founder, HillClimbers - HillClimbers.org



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

**NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICE FOR THE BLIND AND
PRINT DISABLED (NLS) TALKING BOOK SERVICE**

WITNESS

JESSE SHIREK, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS SPECIALIST, NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND

Mr. VALADAO. And now I recognize Mr. Shirek for his 3 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JESSE SHIREK

Mr. SHIREK. Hi. My name is Jesse Shirek. I am a government affairs specialist with the National Federation of the Blind.

I am here to talk to you today about the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled Talking Book Service. We are asking you, as a membership, to continue funding the National Library Service Talking Book Service.

It is a critical service needed by blind people across the country. There are some 8.3 million, estimated, blind and low-vision people across the country of all ages, and it is a critical service. And I will describe briefly why it is a critical service.

I was born blind, and as a young person I became a talking-book patron at 7 years old. So I have been a talking-book patron for 39 years. Until that point, I always had to have somebody read to me, a family member or a friend, and wasn't able to read on my own. But when I received Talking Book Service, I was able to use the audio books and the Braille books, and it made a tremendous difference in my educational career and my professional development. And it is a service that I still rely on heavily to this day.

It is an extremely valuable service—I don't want to just tell you about my personal experience, but prior to working for the National Federation of the Blind, I was a blind skills instructor, so I taught adults who were losing eyesight. And one of the things they would often say to me is, "I can't read anymore. You know, I used to love to read. This isn't something I can take part in anymore." And I would demonstrate a talking-book player or a Braille e-reader and show them how to use the technology, and all of a sudden they were able to read. It is a transformative moment in their life.

And it helps blind people to be successful in school, be successful in their jobs, and be successful—for our older adults who are retired, it helps them to, you know, enjoy those golden years and gives so much hope back to people.

So, on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind, on behalf of the 8.3 million blind and low-vision Americans, we ask you to continue supporting the National Library Service and keep funding it at its current level.

Thank you.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, sir.

[The information follows:]



**Testimony of Jesse Shirek, Representing the National Federation of the Blind,
Before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations,
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Wednesday, April 9, 2025**

Good morning Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, Chair Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, and other members of the Committee. My name is Jesse Shirek, and I am a Government Affairs Specialist with the National Federation of the Blind, the transformative membership and advocacy organization of blind Americans. Thank you for granting us the opportunity to share the critical importance of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) talking book service.

We acknowledge that our government is undergoing a critical time of examination in which we must ensure that programs and services are operating at utmost efficiency and effectiveness. Simultaneously, we must protect the programs and services that our citizens are reliant upon. The NLS talking book service is one of those essential programs and is without substitute. We urge you to maintain at least the current level of funding for the program.

According to the American Community Survey conducted by the United States Census Bureau, in 2023, an estimated 2.5 percent of the United States population, or approximately 8.3 million non-institutionalized people report having a vision disability. To further break it down by age, there are 624,600 individuals 17 and under, 4,280,000 individuals between the ages of 18-64, and 3,396,500 individuals aged 65 or older.

The NLS talking book service and the associated network of state and regional talking book libraries is the only comprehensive source of talking books, hardcopy and electronic Braille nonfiction books, fiction books and publications available to blind, low-vision, and print disabled Americans. These materials are delivered in a variety of formats suitable for readers from a wide range of backgrounds and technical abilities. The talking books can be experienced on a standalone talking digital player, a smart phone app, or a smart speaker. Electronic Braille can be utilized through the Braille e-readers distributed through the associated network of talking book libraries, but can also be accessed on a wide range of Braille reading devices. A person with normal eyesight can walk into their local library and have access to thousands of reading materials on the shelves, but a blind or low-vision person does not have that same level of access to accessible materials, which is why the network of talking book libraries are so critically important to provide access to blind and print-disabled individuals.

I would like to illustrate these points through my personal experience. I am a blind person. I have been using reading materials from the NLS for thirty-nine years. I signed up for the service when I was seven years old. This was a transformative moment in my

National Federation of the Blind

Mark Riccobono, *President* | 200 East Wells Street at Jernigan Place Baltimore, MD 21230 | 410 659 9314 | www.nfb.org

life, because until that moment I was reliant upon another person to read to me, but when I gained a library card to the state talking book library I had control over what I read, when I read it, and for how long I was able to read. I was able to read without burdening a friend or family member for the first time, and that is a sense of freedom that cannot be understated.

To this day I continue to use electronic Braille and audio talking books for both recreational reading and professional development. I would have been able to make it through school or function at my current professional level without my previous and current access to reading materials through the NLS. Furthermore, in my previous career I taught blind skills instruction to newly-blind adults. One of the first things that I would hear from newly-blind individuals is that they used to love to read, but after becoming blind reading was no longer an option. I would demonstrate the use of a talking book player and how easy it is to obtain and read talking books. This would often shift the perspective of the blind individual from feeling hopeless to gaining an understanding that life is not over and it is possible to enjoy reading without eyesight. This would in turn create further shifts in the individual when they gained understanding that they were once again able to experience past joys and to reconnect with the world in a more meaningful way. The NLS talking book service is quite literally a pathway to a successful education for our young people, a tool to be successfully employable for working age adults, and a source of recreation, stimulation, and joy for older Americans living out their golden years. We urge Congress to recognize the importance of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled talking book service and to

National Federation of the Blind

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ensure the full funding of this vital program in the Fiscal Year 2026 Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind and the millions of blind Americans across the country.

National Federation of the Blind

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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

HOUSE MODERNIZATION INITIATIVES ACCOUNT

WITNESS

JOHN D. RACKEY, SENIOR POLICY ANALYST, STRUCTURAL DEMOCRACY PROJECT, BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

Mr. VALADAO. I now recognize Mr. Rackey for his 3 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JOHN D. RACKEY

Mr. RACKEY. Thank you, Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of fiscal year 2026 and your ongoing support of efforts to build capacity in the legislative branch.

My name is J.D. Rackey. I am a senior policy analyst with the Structural Democracy Project at the Bipartisan Policy Center. And, relevant to today, I have also previously had the privilege of serving as professional staff with the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress.

As both a political scientist and someone with experience as a staffer, I can confidently say that I know Congress can best execute its Article I responsibilities only when it adequately invests in its own capacity.

The American people rightly demand efficiency and effectiveness from their government. However, it is important to remember that efficiency can be gained both from reducing spending and through strategic investment.

That is why I am requesting that funding for the House Modernization Initiatives Account be appropriated at the \$10 million level, which is a return to the level allocated in fiscal year 2024 and the version of fiscal year 2025 that was approved by this subcommittee prior to the CR.

I also request the inclusion of report language that would create reporting requirements for entities receiving funds from the account.

We know that MIA has a track record of success, helping launch programs such as Deconflict in House CAO, CaseCompass, and a comprehensive legislative drafting study, among many others.

While knowledge of the good work funded by this account exists among Members and staff and close observers of the institution, the public accounting of this fund is kind of scattered across a handful of reports and testimony before this subcommittee and the Committee on House Administration. To my knowledge, there is no one location that details which projects have benefited from MIA funds or the current status of those projects.

Requiring the generation of more standardized reporting requirements for MIA funds will help increase accountability and inform future modernizers about successful approaches used by current modernization efforts.

On a related note, additional BPC testimony submitted by former Senators Heitkamp and Martinez makes clear that Congress must do more to respond to the Supreme Court's Loper Bright decision

and the ending of Chevron deference. MIA funds can help get the ball rolling by funding improvements to the FlagTrack program, development of a tour tracking program, and, in particular, the expansion of the newly developed committee portal.

Again, thank you for your work on these important issues and for the opportunity to provide public testimony, and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Rackey.

[The information follows:]



Written Testimony of John D. Rackey, Ph.D.
Senior Policy Analyst for Structural Democracy

**Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch:
Member Day and Public Witness Day**

April 9, 2025

Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the fiscal year 2026 (FY2026) legislative branch appropriations bill. My name is J.D. Rackey, and I am a senior policy analyst for the Structural Democracy Project at the Bipartisan Policy Center. I previously had the privilege of serving as professional staff with the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. My background as a political scientist and experience as a staffer has taught me that Congress can best execute its Article I responsibilities when it adequately invests in its own capacity. With that in mind, I request that funding for the House Modernization Initiatives Account (MIA) be appropriated at the \$10 million level in FY2026, which is a return to the funding level allocated in FY2025 prior to the passage of H.R.1968. Further, I request the inclusion of report language that would create reporting requirements for entities receiving funds from the account.

The American people rightly demand efficiency and effectiveness from their government. However, it is important to remember that efficiency can be gained in two ways: by reducing spending *and* through strategic investment. Strategic investment of MIA funds in projects that build the institution's capacity will yield workplace and workforce efficiencies in the legislative branch that will far outweigh the funds spent. Investments in congressional capacity move Congress into the modern, digital age and ensure that the institution can

adequately respond to an increasingly advanced world. The complex nature of public policy problems means that Congress must have the appropriate tools and technology in place to intake, process, understand, and evaluate an enormous volume of information to properly grapple with the pressing issues of the day. Since its creation, the MIA has helped move the institution forward and better position Congress to serve the American people by funding the development of tools that allow members and staff to work more effectively and efficiently.

Modernization Initiatives Account Successes

As the subcommittee will recall, the MIA was created in FY2021 to implement the work of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. During its tenure, the MIA made numerous projects possible, including the initial development of *Deconflict* by the House Digital Service¹ and the scoping of important updates to the lobbying disclosure portal maintained by the Office of the Clerk. More recently, the Committee on House Administration's Modernization & Innovation Subcommittee, under the leadership of Rep. Stephanie Bice (R-OK), has continued to use the MIA to implement the Select Committee's recommendations. This includes but is not limited to projects such as: 1) the bulk purchasing of eDiscovery tools for committees, which allows for the better processing of oversight inquiry documents, ultimately making oversight efforts more substantive and policy oriented, 2) the development and piloting of CaseCompass, a tool that anonymously aggregates constituent casework data to help better inform congressional oversight efforts and better serve constituents, and 3) a study on the current state of the legislative drafting ecosystem within

¹ Deconflict is a scheduling tool designed to assist committees reduce the number of member scheduling conflicts during hearings and markups. As our previous research shows, this continues to be a major problem for the House, more information here: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/optimizing-the-u-s-congressional-calendar-to-boost-legislative-productivity/>



the House, a first step toward improving drafting tools to facilitate greater collaboration among staff and the Office of the Legislative Counsel.

It is credit to the work of this subcommittee and the Subcommittee on Modernization & Innovation that the administration of the MIA has been careful and deliberate. To date, the investments made possible by this account have been nothing but wins for the institution, all while maintaining the strictest level of fiscal responsibility and producing no known instances of waste or fraud—something that is a rarity when it comes to federal spending.

Continued Accountability

The members and staff of this subcommittee and the Committee on House Administration (CHA) are well aware of how MIA funds have been invested and the improvements those investments have brought to legislative branch operations. However, the people currently working on modernization issues won't always be here—as we know, turnover in the legislative branch is near an all-time high. Outside of this committee and within the House more broadly, there is a limited understanding of the improvements yielded by these investments. Therefore, it is crucial to continue building an ample official record of how modernization funds are used, as well as the ongoing status of those projects. I commend the subcommittee for including information in the FY2025 report about some of the projects that have been supported by MIA funds and urge you to continue to do so in a robust way.²

Requiring recipients of modernization funds to provide status updates to this subcommittee and the CHA serves the long-term success of the MIA by creating the infrastructure needed for evidence-based oversight and accountability checks to ensure

² Available here: <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP00/20240613/117435/HMKP-118-AP00-20240613-SD004.pdf>



continued fiscal responsibility. Reporting requirements will also add to the historical record of current modernization efforts so future stewards of the institution will know more about the types of efforts currently underway, which may in turn inform their work.

The Time for Capacity Is Now

Ground-shifting developments have brought declining congressional capacity to the fore. Last summer's Supreme Court decision in *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo* has significant implications for the legislative branch that have not yet been addressed. As many scholars of Congress have written (and I agree), the decision now requires Congress to be much more active and detailed in its policymaking.³ However, Congress currently lacks the necessary expertise and staff capacity to do so. BPC's working group recently released a report identifying areas ripe for congressional action in response to this and other recent decisions.⁴

In addition to the steps recommended by the working group, there are still many select committee recommendations that need to be implemented or built upon where robust MIA funding would be useful. Significant efficiencies can be gained in two areas that currently consume considerable staff time and office resources while simultaneously improving the public's ability to interface with member offices: 1) the FlagTrack program, which allows constituents and staff to more efficiently handle flag requests, needs further refining, and 2) the development or bulk purchasing of software to help streamline Capitol, White House, and agency tour requests. Additionally, Congress needs many more tools to help make sense of the tidal wave of information flowing into each office daily. Despite public perception, research has

³ See, Kornberg, Maya and Martha Kinsella. "Whether the Supreme Court Rolls Back Agency Authority, Congress Needs More Expert Capabilities." *Brennan Center*, May 30, 2023; Kosar, Kevin. "Congress Should get ready for a post-Chevron America." *The Hill*, April 9, 2024, among others.

⁴ See, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/final-report-and-recommendations/>



shown that Congress does not suffer from a lack of information, but instead one of sorting, filtering, and operationalizing the information it receives. One tool that could help is the new committee portal that has been in development and is being piloted with committees. Continuing to develop and expand the portal to look for ways to integrate it with additional sources of congressional data will improve efficiency in information processing, helping to free up staff time for other activities. The MIA and the projects it supports are key to helping Congress meet this moment.

Conclusion

Over the past six years, the modernization movement has made tremendous progress in making Congress more effective, efficient, and transparent on behalf of the American people. On a bipartisan basis, those inside and outside the institution have routinely praised House modernization efforts as an example of Congress functioning as it should: hearing from experts, debating and formulating policy solutions, and following through on implementation. This subcommittee's continued investment in the implementation of modernization initiatives is part of what has led to such success. The House Modernization Initiatives Account should continue to be funded at a robust level so that the House can continue to execute on the promise of the Modernization Committee's recommendations. Including reporting requirements will bring greater transparency and accountability into the modernization process, help ensure taxpayer dollars are spent responsibly, and help build a public record of the successes and advancements that the current modernization effort has brought to Congress, ultimately allowing it to better deliver for the American people.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

IMPROVING CONGRESS'S ACCESS TO AGENCY REPORTS

WITNESS

DANIEL SCHUMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AMERICAN GOVERNANCE INSTITUTE

Mr. VALADAO. And I now recognize Mr. Schuman for his 3 minutes.

STATEMENT OF DANIEL SCHUMAN

Mr. SCHUMAN. Thank you, Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, Representative Moore. It is good to be testifying before you, and thank you so much for having the public come in and testify before this committee. I am excited to be here, and I appreciate the opportunity.

My name is Daniel Schuman, and I am the executive director of the American Governance Institute. And today I want to talk about improving congressional access to reports from Federal agencies.

Over the years, Congress has directed Federal agencies to provide thousands of reports to Congress, but it is not always possible to find these reports.

To keep track, for 203 years, the House has asked the Clerk to maintain a list.

I brought a prop. I hope you don't mind.

This is the list of the reports that are due to Congress each year. This is a list of the reports that are due to the House and to the Senate. It is 412 pages long. I did not count how many reports are actually in here, but there is a bunch.

And a couple years ago, the Congress passed legislation for all the reports that the agencies are submitting to be made available to GPO. So GPO is maintaining an archive of them all. This all sounds good and fine, right?

The problem is that this voluminous list only includes the reports that are due to the House and due to the Senate, but not the reports that are due to the committees and the subcommittees.

And the agencies are not providing all the reports to Congress that they are supposed to provide. We don't know which ones are missing, because we don't have a list of all of them.

I spoke with the Clerk's Office. The Clerk's Office would be more than happy to update this list to include reports that are due to the House and the Senate as well as its committees and subcommittees, but they have a resource problem. They can't afford to generate the list that is to include those due to committees and subcommittees. They said that they would need two additional executive communication clerks—that is about \$350,000—to go and make sure that you have a list of what is due to the committees and subcommittees as well as to the House and to the Senate.

Because right now on GPO's website, despite this gigantic document, there are only 716 reports posted there, so presumably there is a bunch missing. If GPO can check the list of what they receive against the list that is required, then you can go and follow up

with the agencies to find out the ones that are missing and make sure that they are providing it.

You could either pay two people to go and comb through all the laws and find this stuff or maybe technology can help do this.

Last year, you all directed the Clerk to make recommendations to you about how to solve this problem.

My request this year is to go ahead and direct the Clerk now to solve the problem. Appropriate \$350,000—fortunately, this is not that much in comparison to, say, what the Capitol Police were asking for just the other day—\$350,000 to either update this list or to build an AI tool or some other tool to track it.

This would make it easier for you all to do oversight over the agencies. It would make it easier for the public to find this information. And it would solve a problem that Congress has been trying to solve since 1822, which is to find all the reports that are due to Congress, so you can actually read the reports, figure out which ones are unnecessary and get rid of those, and make better decisions about the things that you are trying to do.

This committee has long been supportive of improving and making the legislative branch more capable. This is another small step in that direction.

So thank you. I appreciate it.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Schuman.

[The information follows:]

**Testimony of Daniel Schuman Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the
Legislative Branch, FY 2026, Concerning Agency Reports to Congress and the Clerk's
Tabulation of the Titles of Those Reports**

Dear Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and members of the House Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee:

Thank you for providing the opportunity for written public witness testimony and for restoring the tradition of in-person public witness testimony. I commend the Committee's efforts on the FY 2025 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill, aimed at responsibly strengthening congressional operations. I look forward to the Committee advancing congressional modernization on a bipartisan basis for FY 2026.

My name is Daniel Schuman, and I serve as the Executive Director of the American Governance Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to renewing and modernizing the institutions of American government. I am a former congressional staffer and a longtime supporter of the Subcommittee's work.

My testimony today concerns improving Congress's access to agency reports. The House and Senate routinely require federal agencies to provide reports to Congress on a wide range of policy matters. House Rules¹ require the Clerk to compile a list of mandated reports. Separately,

¹ House Rule II, clause 2(b). "At the commencement of every regular session of Congress, the Clerk shall make and cause to be delivered to each Member, Delegate, and the Resident Commissioner a list of the reports that any officer or Department is required to make to Congress, citing the law or resolution in which the requirement may be contained and placing under the name of each officer the list of reports required to be made by such officer."

federal law² — co-authored by Rep. Mike Quigley, who serves on the Committee — requires agencies to submit reports³ to the Government Publishing Office for publication on its website.⁴

These requirements are intended to (1) enable Members to identify agency reports on matters of legislative interest and (2) facilitate easy access to those reports. They also assist Congress in identifying duplicative or outdated reporting obligations.

As Congress previously noted:⁵

Agencies expend taxpayer-funded time and resources to produce [thousands of agency] reports which are intended to inform legislation or congressional oversight of agency operations, yet the general public and Congress itself faces obstacles in locating and reviewing these reports. In addition, when congressional staff who receive a report move on, or there is a transition at a committee, historical reports often are lost.

Despite these efforts, a significant implementation gap persists. If an agency fails to transmit a mandated report to GPO, there is no systematic method for identifying the omission. While GPO could compare received reports against the Clerk's list, the Clerk's list only covers reports mandated for submission to the full House or Senate, not those directed to committees or subcommittees.

² *Access to Congressionally Mandated Reports Act* (ACMRA), enacted as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY23 (P.L. 117-263, §7241-7248).

³ There are a number of exceptions for reports that could be withheld under the Freedom of Information Act and for other reasons.

⁴ <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/CMR>

⁵ S. Rept. 117-106

The Committee recognized this challenge in its FY 2025 report,⁶ directing the Clerk, the Library of Congress, GPO, and the Congressional Data Task Force to describe the challenges and opportunities associated with making these reports more readily available and discoverable.⁷ That report has not been submitted.

There are several potential solutions to close the implementation gap:

- **Manual approach:** Appropriate \$350,000 to fund two additional executive communications clerks in the Clerk's office to manually identify all reports required by statute, including those sent to committees and subcommittees.
- **Technology-Based Approach:** Direct the Clerk to develop or procure modern computational tools, including artificial intelligence when appropriate, to automate identification of reporting obligations. The feasibility and cost of this approach remain uncertain but could yield broader applications for legislative operations.
- **Agency-Sourced Approach:** Require or encourage agency congressional liaisons to submit their internal reporting obligation lists to the Clerk and GPO. While beneficial, this approach may pose reliability or jurisdictional concerns.

⁶ Testimony of Daniel Schuman before the House Legislative Branch Appropriations Committee, FY 25, available at: <https://www.congress.gov/118/meeting/house/117122/witnesses/HHRG-118-AP24-Wstate-SchumanD-20240417.pdf>

⁷ "Congressionally Mandated Reports.—The Committee recognizes the value of making statute-required reports more readily available and discoverable. The Committee requests that the Office of the Clerk, in consultation with the Library of Congress, the Government Publishing Office, and the Congressional Data Task Force, author a report describing the challenges and opportunities associated with making these reports more readily available and discoverable. The scope of the report shall include, but not be limited to (1) reports covered by Public Law 117–263 and listed in H. Doc. 118–4; (2) potential impacts, if enacted, of S. 2073, the Eliminate Useless Reports Act of 2023; and (3) if it is feasible that submitted reports to Congress be delivered to House committees electronically via the Clerk's Committee portal in concert with the Government Publishing Office's Congressionally Mandated Reports submission portal or GovInfo. The report shall be submitted to the House Committee on Appropriations and the Committee on House Administration within 180 days of enactment of this Act."

In any event, the Clerk should be tasked with creating a comprehensive, machine-readable tabulation of all statutorily required reports to Congress, including those directed to committees and subcommittees. This tabulation would allow GPO to automatically verify agency compliance.

The current state of compliance is alarming: only 716 mandated reports are available on the GPO's website, despite the expectation that thousands—if not tens of thousands—should be published annually.

Accordingly, we respectfully request the Committee:

- Direct the Clerk to identify all agency reports due to Congress, including to committees and subcommittees, beginning in FY 2026
- Appropriate \$350,000 to support implementation
- Direct the Clerk to consult with GPO and to provide regular progress updates to the Committee and to the Congressional Data Task Force.

Thank you for your consideration. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations further.

Mr. VALADAO. I would like to see if any of my colleagues would like to be recognized to ask a question of the first panel.

All right. Well, I would like to thank the panel for your time today and for your comments, and you guys are excused.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

**INCREASING THE GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY
OFFICE'S RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

WITNESS

DAN LIPS, SENIOR FELLOW, FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN INNOVATION

Mr. VALADAO. And we will start with the second panel.

All right. Well, I appreciate you guys all appearing here today.

And I would like to recognize Mr. Lips to provide his 3-minute summary of his testimony.

STATEMENT OF DAN LIPS

Mr. LIPS. Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, Representative Moore, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Dan Lips, and I am a senior fellow with the Foundation for American Innovation.

I respectfully request the subcommittee include report language aimed at increasing the Government Accountability Office's return on investment and impact.

As you heard from the Comptroller General this morning, GAO has an impressive track record, delivering a return of \$123 for every dollar provided by Congress over the past 6 years. All Americans should be grateful for the hard work of Congress's watchdog agency.

But the subcommittee should ask, how can Congress further increase GAO's return on investment? Over the past 3 years, GAO's ROI has averaged just 78 to 1, well below that 6-year average.

Today, more than 5,200 GAO recommendations remain open, and last year GAO reported that agencies had failed to implement 30 percent of recommendations made 4 years ago. Congress could save hundreds of billions of dollars by enacting GAO's nonpartisan recommendations in a timely manner.

This subcommittee has already taken important steps, including requiring quarterly reports on improper payments, public estimates of potential savings associated with open recommendations, and directing GAO to attach deadlines or timeframes to new recommendations, all to increase ROI.

Each of these steps is valuable, and I encourage you to continue requiring these reports in fiscal year 2026.

In addition, I respectfully recommend two new reporting requirements.

First, require the Congressional Budget Office to issue a report estimating the potential budgetary effects of implementing open GAO recommendations. Former CBO Director Keith Hall has explained that such a report would provide, quote, "a useful measure

of preventable waste,” helping Congress increase pressure on agencies and improving GAO’s ROI.

Second, direct GAO to use artificial intelligence to review Federal regulations and identify outdated language.

Last year, Congress enacted a bipartisan law, the GAO Database Modernization Act, which requires GAO to track outdated rules that are identified and eliminated by Federal agencies. Now Congress can increase GAO’s role in conducting regulatory oversight, including by leveraging technology.

The State of Ohio successfully used AI, combined with human oversight, to streamline its code, eliminating nearly 5 million words or one-third of its regulatory text. GAO could provide nonpartisan analysis to inform a similar regulatory cleanup effort for the Federal Government.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Lips.

[The information follows:]



April 4, 2025

Dan Lips, Senior Fellow, Foundation for American Innovation
Written Testimony for U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Legislative Branch

Government Accountability Office: Increasing GAO's Return on Investment

Chairman Valado, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony about the Government Accountability Office's appropriations. I am a senior fellow at the Foundation for American Innovation, an organization focused on developing technology, talent, and future to create a better, freer, and more abundant future. I am writing to respectfully recommend several reporting requirements for the Subcommittee to include in the report accompanying the FY2026 funding bill to increase GAO's return on investment for American taxpayers.

Each year, GAO helps Congress and the executive branch achieve cost savings and valuable government reforms that benefit American taxpayers. Since 2002, GAO's work has achieved \$1.5 trillion in financial benefits.¹ The Comptroller General estimates that GAO's annual return on investment has been \$123 to \$1 over the past six years.²

While GAO's value to Congress is unquestioned, lawmakers should consider opportunities to increase GAO's return-on-investment and reverse the following trends. Over the past three years, GAO's ROI has averaged \$78 to \$1, which is 37 percent below GAO's six-year average.³ In FY2024, GAO reported that its 4-year implementation rate for recommendations was 70 percent, or well below GAO's target of 80 percent and below its preceding five year average of 76 percent.⁴ Over the past four fiscal years, Congress has directed GAO to issue reports and take actions aimed to increase its return on investment, including requiring quarterly reporting on improper payments since FY2023,⁵ annual

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Performance and Accountability Report: Fiscal Year 2024*, GAO-25-900570 (November 2024), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/880/873251.pdf>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. Author calculations.

⁴ Ibid. Author calculations.

⁵ U.S. House of Representatives, *Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill, 2023*, H. Rep. 117-389, 117th Cong., 2nd sess. (2022).

estimates of cost savings associated with unimplemented recommendations,⁶ and cost savings associated with “open matters for Congressional consideration.”⁷ Last year, the subcommittee took the additional valuable step of requiring GAO to begin a pilot project establishing time frames “in which a recommendation should be able to be fully implemented,” and to brief the committee on the pilot.⁸ Each of these actions should spur GAO to identify additional opportunities for federal agencies and Congress to achieve cost savings and increase efficiency. For example, in 2024, GAO reported that implementing the more than 5,400 open recommendations at the time could yield between \$106 and \$208 billion in savings.⁹ In addition, GAO reported that action by Congress to implement its “open matters for Congressional consideration” could yield additional financial benefits, totalling well more than \$100 billion in savings.¹⁰

In the FY2026 report accompanying the Legislative Branch appropriations act, I respectfully request that you include the following reporting requirements to further increase GAO’s return-on-investment for taxpayers:

First, the Subcommittee should direct the Congressional Budget Office to issue a report estimating potential cost savings that could be achieved by implementing GAO’s open recommendations for federal agencies and GAO’s open matters for Congressional consideration. As mentioned above, Congress has already directed GAO to make annual estimates of potential cost savings associated with its unimplemented recommendations. To improve transparency about government waste, the subcommittee should direct the Congressional Budget Office to issue an annual report estimating potential budgetary effects associated with unimplemented GAO recommendations. According to former CBO Director Keith Hall, such a CBO report would offer a “useful measure of preventable waste

⁶ 168 Cong. Rec. S7819, S9210 (daily ed. Dec. 20, 2022) (explanatory statement submitted by Sen. Leahy, Chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, regarding H.R. 2617, *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023*). H.R. 2617 was enacted as Pub. L. No. 117-328, 136 Stat. 4459 (2022).

⁷ Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211, 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022).

⁸ Committee on Appropriations, *Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill, 2025*, H.R. 118-XXX, 118th Cong., 2d sess. (2024), <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP00/20240613/117435/HMKP-118-AP00-20240613-SD004.pdf>.

⁹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Open GAO Recommendations: Financial Benefits Could Be Between \$106 Billion and \$208 Billion* (July 2024), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-107146>.

¹⁰ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Recommendations for Congress: Action Can Produce Billions of Dollars in Financial and Other Benefits*, GAO-24-107261 (June 2024) <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-107261#:~:text=Action%20by%20Congress%20to%20address,nation%20to%20address%20future%20challenges>.

and fraud that would help Congress put pressure on agencies to act” and “help make agencies more accountable in how they spend taxpayers’ dollars.”¹¹

Second, the Committee should direct GAO to conduct retrospective regulatory reviews to identify potential rules, regulations, and policy guidance that could be streamlined.

GAO has statutory responsibilities related to reviewing and monitoring federal regulations, including through the Congressional Review Act to maintain a public database of proposed rules.¹² For example, in 2024, Congress enacted the GAO Database Modernization Act, which requires federal agencies to notify GAO of rules that are “being revoked, suspended, replaced, amended, or otherwise made ineffective.”¹³ Congress should direct GAO, potentially through its Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics (STAA) team, to use technology to conduct retrospective regulatory review. The state of Ohio has used artificial intelligence and human oversight to streamline the state’s code of regulations, eliminating nearly five million words, or one-third of the text.¹⁴ A similar effort at the federal level, led by the nonpartisan GAO, could identify significant efficiencies that could be achieved by streamlining regulations. Requiring GAO to do this work would be an important step toward rebuilding Congressional regulatory oversight capacity.¹⁵

Third, the Subcommittee should reiterate its requirements of the GAO to continue its quarterly reporting on improper payments, annual estimates of potential cost savings associated with unimplemented recommendations, and the pilot project to establish time frames for the enactment of recommendations to federal agencies. In 2010, Congress passed a law requiring GAO to issue annual reports examining duplication across government programs. Over the past 14 years, this work has resulted in more than

¹¹ Dan Lips, “The Best Way for DOGE to Cut Government Waste,” *City Journal*, February 20, 2025, <https://www.city-journal.org/article/doge-elon-musk-government-spending-gao-cbo>.

¹² U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Congressional Review Act,” accessed March 24, 2025, <https://www.gao.gov/legal/congressional-review-act>.

¹³ *Public Law 118-97*, 138 Stat. 1573 (2024), <https://www.congress.gov/118/plaws/publ97/PLAW-118publ97.pdf>.

¹⁴ Jon Husted, “AI Can Be a Force for Deregulation: Washington Can Follow Ohio’s Lead and Use Technology to Remove Outdated, Conflicting, and Redundant Rules from the Federal Code,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 23, 2025, https://www.wsj.com/opinion/ai-can-be-a-force-for-deregulation-technology-government-ohio-federal-365ed0d4?mod=opinion_lead_pos8.

¹⁵ Satya Thallam and Dan Lips, *Empowering Regulatory Oversight: How Congress Can Hold the Administrative State Accountable*, Foundation for American Innovation (June 2023), <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/d81rla4f/staging/6731d2e4c7fb69af52edc2c6b179b67ef50ae86e.pdf>.

\$667 billion dollars in savings.¹⁶ Similarly, the reporting requirements established by Congress and the Subcommittee over the past three years have the potential to spur similar savings over time as GAO increases its return on investment. To that end, the Subcommittee should reiterate its recent reporting requirements aimed at increasing the implementation of open GAO recommendations and focusing GAO's work on overseeing federal improper payments.

Fourth, the Subcommittee should direct GAO to issue a report providing recommendations for opportunities to change its funding model. Given the constraints on the federal and legislative branch budget, Congress should consider opportunities to substantially increase funding for GAO, given its track record of achieving substantial cost savings, without reducing resources for other entities in the legislative branch. For example, GAO's funding model could be modified to include some savings from federal agencies achieved by implementing the watchdog agency's recommendation. Another model could involve proportionally funding GAO's budget across all appropriations subcommittees, in addition to the Legislative Branch subcommittee, since GAO's work relates to and provides value for departments and agencies across the government and all Congressional authorizing and appropriations committees.¹⁷

* * *

As Comptroller General Gene Dodaro's 15-year term comes to an end, the future of GAO is in the hands of President Trump and the Congress. The next Comptroller General must be given a mandate to correct the nation's "unsustainable fiscal path"¹⁸ by leveraging oversight to identify and achieve cost savings for the American people. The United States cannot afford to have 30 percent of GAO's recommendations ignored and for hundreds of billions of cost-savings measures to be delayed. The Subcommittee can do its part to provide that mandate by continuing its leadership in directing GAO to take these actions to increase its return on investment.

¹⁶ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Billions of Dollars in Financial Benefits*, GAO-24-106915 (March 2024), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106915.pdf>.

¹⁷ Demand Progress Education Fund, *A New Funding Model for GAO*, October 2021, https://s3.amazonaws.com/demandprogress/reports/A_new_funding_model_for_GAO_-_October_2021.pdf.

¹⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *The Nation's Fiscal Health: Strategy Needed as Debt Levels Accelerate*, GAO-25-107714, March 2025, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-107714.pdf>.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

STRENGTHENING THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH BY IMPROVING ITS TOOLS FOR CONDUCTING BIPARTISAN OVERSIGHT

WITNESS

JAMES TOWNSEND, DIRECTOR, CARL LEVIN CENTER FOR OVERSIGHT AND DEMOCRACY, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Mr. VALADAO. And now I recognize Mr. Townsend for his 3 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JAMES TOWNSEND

Mr. TOWNSEND. Thank you, Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Vice Chair Moore.

I am Jim Townsend, and I am director of the Carl Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy at Wayne State University Law School. And I really want to express my appreciation for the opportunity to testify to you today about how we can strengthen the first branch of government through improving its tools for conducting oversight—bipartisan oversight in particular.

So I am going to mention three items that are in a letter that I sent to you along with my colleague at the Project on Government Oversight. There were nine items in that, but, in the interest of time, I am going to focus on three items that we think are particularly important for strengthening oversight. Those three items are: bipartisan websites, bipartisan reports, and hiring administrative staff on a bipartisan basis.

So, before I get to those, I just want to say a word about the Levin Center. We are an institute founded by Senator Carl Levin upon his retirement from the U.S. Senate back about 10 years ago now, in 2015. Senator Levin was known for his bipartisan work, his alliances he built across the aisle, to do oversight, to really get into the specifics and to dig into the problems that are facing the American people.

Our, sort of, guiding light and principle is that, when you are conducting the oversight, you are acting as the eyes and voice of the American people. And those words, “eyes and voice,” don’t come from us; they come from the Supreme Court in a seminal ruling over 70 years ago on the power of Congress to subpoena information.

So, in that spirit, I just want to mention these three priorities. The first one is bipartisan websites.

Websites right now in the Senate are formed on a bipartisan basis, but, in the House, oftentimes we have Democratic websites and Republican websites. And this is a problem on several fronts.

First, it is a waste of resources. Having duplicate websites is obviously twice what, you know—you are incurring more costs than you need to.

Secondly, it really encourages partisanship in fact-finding. And that is really the opposite of what you are charged with doing in being the eyes and voice of the people. Really good oversight and fact-finding work is done on a bipartisan basis, because you get a

greater breadth of information, you get viewpoints coming from different sides, all in pursuit of the facts and trying to reach some consensus on how to move forward.

So the other problem with having separate, partisan websites is, a lot of times, documents created by the committee are lost when partisan control flips in the chamber.

The last two items I want to mention, though, are bipartisan reports—which, again, same problem. When you are issuing minority and majority reports, it is much more difficult for the public to understand actually where you stand, because they have to read two different reports to get that information.

And, finally, administrative staff. The functions of administrative personnel are really not partisan in nature. You know, issuing subpoenas, dealing with all the paperwork that has to be done to conduct oversight, to log the information that is gathered—all of this is not really a partisan concern. And so we really think it would be a much better practice and, again, a much more cost-effective practice if this could be conducted on a bipartisan basis and administrative personnel were bipartisan.

So, again, thank you for this opportunity, and I look forward to any of your questions.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Townsend.

[The information follows:]

Testimony of James Townsend
Director, Carl Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy at Wayne State University
Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch, FY 2026
Concerning Ways to Strengthen the First Branch of Government
by Strengthening Tools for Congressional Oversight

Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat and Members of the Legislative Branch
Appropriations Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony regarding ways to strengthen the first branch of government that are consistent with the intent of those who framed our Constitution. I am the Director of the Carl Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy, which is part of Wayne State University Law School in Detroit, Michigan.¹ To strengthen Congress's ability to conduct fact based, bipartisan oversight, I along with the Director of the Project on Government Oversight have recently suggested to the Committee via letter several modest reforms, all of which could be addressed by the House of Representatives in report language accompanying the FY26 legislative branch appropriations bill -- at little to no cost, and likely saving taxpayer dollars. In this testimony I highlight the three we consider most impactful: 1) bipartisan committee websites, 2) bipartisan reports, and 3) bipartisan administrative personnel in oversight committees. All three will strengthen the role of Congress, save taxpayer dollars and increase accountability in government.

By way of background, the Levin Center was established to honor the legacy of Senator Carl Levin who, during his long career representing Michigan in the Senate, championed fact-based, bipartisan oversight and civil discourse. Senator Levin used to say, "Good government requires good oversight." He also appreciated that the Supreme Court has long recognized

¹ The Levin Center is affiliated with Wayne State University Law School, but our views do not necessarily present those of either the University or the Law School.

Congress' need for information to carry out its constitutional responsibilities. Nearly 100 years ago, in an 8-0 opinion upholding a congressional subpoena seeking information related to the Attorney General, the Supreme Court wrote: "[T]he power of inquiry—with process to enforce it—is an essential and appropriate auxiliary to the legislative function. ... A legislative body cannot legislate wisely or effectively in the absence of information."²

Investigating facts – what happened and why – and analyzing complex problems are at the heart of congressional oversight. They are critical to Congress' work to enact effective legislation, allocate federal funds, review nominations, evaluate military actions, and inform the public about what its government is doing. When done well, oversight can save taxpayer dollars, ease problems affecting communities, strengthen federal programs, and carry out Congress' constitutional obligation to provide a check on abuse. Oversight can also help bridge political divides by providing legislators with an opportunity to develop a mutual understanding of a problem and reach consensus on the facts. Consensus on the facts can then provide the foundation needed to develop bipartisan reforms.

Since 2015, along with the Project on Government Oversight and the Lugar Center, we have offered "Oversight Boot Camps" twice a year for House and Senate staff from both political parties and from both committee and personal offices and to produce a nonpartisan, bicameral experience. To date, more than 500 congressional staff have completed our instruction on how to do fact-based, bipartisan, in-depth investigations.

² *McGrain v. Daugherty*, 273 U.S. 135, 174-175 (1927).

As you are no doubt aware, while Senate Committees host bipartisan websites, facilitating the sharing and endurance of information and work product from one Congress to the next, the House permits committees to create partisan websites that post information prepared exclusively by the majority or minority. This practice not only contributes to partisanship at the committee level, but it also impedes bipartisan oversight, makes it more difficult for the public to follow committee activities, and increases taxpayer costs by requiring the upkeep of two websites instead of one. The use of partisan websites also regularly contributes to the loss of online committee records after changes in party or committee leadership. In fact, the Levin Center has initiated a new project, the Congressional Oversight Records Database (CORD), dedicated to locating and publishing committee work product, many of whose links are either no longer live or have disappeared altogether, locating it on the “hidden” web, and making it available again. Today, we have recovered and made available at <https://www.cord-levin-center.org/home> thousands of congressional oversight reports and materials from the last 25 years, many of which had been posted and then lost. The House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress unanimously recommended use of bipartisan websites as well.

Relatedly, committees conducting oversight often issue reports summarizing their factual findings and recommendations, but on occasion the majority and minority issue separate reports on the same investigation. Separate reports encourage partisan analysis, make it more difficult for the public to understand the committee’s oversight work and any areas of disagreement among committee members, and increase taxpayer costs by producing two reports instead of one. Committees also risk losing copies of minority reports that are posted

solely on minority committee websites. A better practice is for committees to issue a single report which includes any additional or dissenting views of committee members. As the Project on Government Oversight pointed out in a 2017 report, *Necessary and Proper: Best Practices for Congressional Investigations*, Senate committees often produce bipartisan reports that include lengthy additional or dissenting views, demonstrating the practicality of that approach.

Finally, while many House committees and subcommittees employ nonpartisan administrative personnel, a few hire separate administrative personnel for majority and minority. As a result of being employed by one group of members rather than the full committee, those administrative personnel may perceive their duty to lie not with the overall committee but with one side of the aisle. A committee's administrative tasks should be executed in a nonpartisan manner, including such oversight-related tasks as preparing and issuing subpoenas, logging documents, releasing deposition transcripts, preparing reports, announcing hearings, compiling hearing records, and archiving investigative materials. In addition, administrative committee staff answering to both sides of the aisle may remain with the committee longer, building institutional knowledge including on oversight matters. The Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress also issued a recommendation calling for committees to "hire bipartisan staff approved by both the Chair and Ranking Member to promote strong institutional knowledge, evidence-based policy making, and a less partisan oversight agenda." Senate committees already successfully follow this practice.

To address these issues, we propose the following report language:

"The Committee directs House committees to merge any existing, partisan websites into a single committee website that identifies all committee and subcommittee members, presents

nonpartisan information about the committee and its activities (including all oversight activities), includes both majority and minority reports, and includes a section allowing the majority and minority to each post joint, majority, or minority committee-related news releases. Committee websites that combine information from the majority and minority encourage bipartisan committee operations and oversight efforts, aid the public in following committee activities, better safeguard committee records for the future, and reduce taxpayer costs by maintaining one website.

“ The Committee encourages House committees conducting oversight investigations, if a decision is made to issue a report, to produce a single oversight report combining majority and minority views whenever possible, rather than separate majority and minority reports, and to include within the joint report any additional or dissenting views by committee members. The Committee believes that committee reports which incorporate additional or dissenting views will encourage bipartisan committee operations, aid the public in understanding the committee’s work and any areas of disagreement among committee members, better safeguard committee records, and reduce taxpayer costs by producing one report, not two.

“The Committee directs House committees to hire administrative staff on a bipartisan basis and allocate employee compensation between the majority and minority on a roughly 50-50 basis. The Committee believes that joint administrative personnel will eliminate duplication by employing fewer administrative staffers, encourage bipartisan administration of committee oversight tasks, and free up limited resources for other oversight professionals. “

Thank you for your consideration of these proposals to strengthen the role of Congress, save taxpayer dollars and increase accountability in government.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

**IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY OF HOUSE OFFICE OF
GENERAL COUNSEL OPINIONS**

WITNESS

**MICHAEL STERN, FORMER SENIOR COUNSEL, HOUSE OFFICE OF
GENERAL COUNSEL**

Mr. VALADAO. I now recognize Mr. Stern for his 3 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL STERN

Mr. STERN. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, Mr. Vice Chairman, thank you very much for this opportunity to testify.

My name is Mike Stern. I have had several roles on the Hill, but, most relevant to my current testimony, I spent 8 years in the House General Counsel's Office, from 1996 to 2004.

Today I would like to talk to you about the need for some greater transparency in the House's legal functions, specifically the public-facing website of the House General Counsel.

Today, the General Counsel's Office has a public website with some very basic information about its functions and some filings from the last 2 years. That is about it that it has.

Moreover, it reports to the Bipartisan Legal Advisory Group, which is responsible for advising the Speaker with regard to the functioning of the House Counsel's Office and for articulating the institutional position of the House in litigation, but BLAG, as it is known, has no website, and there is virtually no information at all about it in any official House source.

This lack of transparency is concerning, because it is in the House's institutional interest for the public to have more information about its legal positions and how they are formulated.

Today, a member of the public or a legal scholar would find it very difficult to find what the House's position is on important legal controversies. In contrast, the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel has a website with hundreds of opinions on executive power, all of which are wrong—no, that is a joke. But it does create a great imbalance between the branches in terms of things like oversight and separation-of-powers issues.

So I will give you one recent example of an OLC opinion which threatens congressional oversight prerogatives.

Last year, the OLC issued an opinion finding that a subpoena from the House Foreign Relations Committee to Secretary of State Antony Blinken was invalid because, well, Secretary Blinken apparently had something on his schedule that conflicted with the date that the committee wanted him to testify.

The idea that congressional subpoenas are invalid just because the executive branch thinks it has something better to do is a novel and dangerous idea. In fact, no less an authority than Paul Colborn, a longstanding veteran, recently retired, of OLC, has publicly expressed concerns about the threat this opinion poses to congressional oversight.

Now, I know there is not a lot we can do to solve this problem today, but we can take a small step in that direction by improving

the House General Counsel's public-facing website. And the place to start would be to take the information that is behind the "For Congressional Offices" tab that is not available to the public, and I believe there is a lot of information there that would be able to be moved to the public side without violating any confidentiality.

So I will stop there and answer any questions you may have.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Stern.

[The information follows:]

**Testimony of Michael Stern Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the
Legislative Branch for Fiscal Year 2026**

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony regarding the Fiscal Year 2026 budget request of the Office of General Counsel for the U.S. House of Representatives (OGC). I have served in various capacities on the Hill as a lawyer and staffer. Most relevant to today's subject, from 1996 to 2004, I was senior counsel in OGC, where I handled a broad range of legal matters for the House and its leadership, members, officers, committees, and staff. Since then I have written on numerous congressional legal issues, including at the Point of Order Blog, and have worked with various groups interested in congressional capacity, transparency, and reform.

Today I will address the need for an enhanced public-facing role for OGC and greater transparency for its activities and those of the Bipartisan Legal Advisory Group (BLAG), which advises the Speaker with regard to the functioning of OGC and is responsible for articulating the institutional position of the House in all litigation matters. While OGC has a public website with some very general information about its functions, as well as a selection of its most recent filings, there is a great deal of additional non-confidential information that would be useful to the public. Moreover, BLAG itself has no website and there appears to be little if any information about its operations in any official House source.

This lack of transparency is particularly concerning because it is in the House's institutional interest for the public to have more information about its legal positions and how they are

formulated. A member of the public seeking to learn about the House's views on important legal controversies would find it very difficult to do so. Legal scholars and commentators are similarly disadvantaged by the lack of access to the opinions of the House's most knowledgeable experts. By contrast, the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel maintains a website on which its numerous legal opinions in support of executive power can easily be accessed. This imbalance of information undermines the House's institutional legal positions in court and with the public, particularly on oversight and other separation of powers issues where it frequently clashes with the executive.

I will give you one recent example of an OLC opinion which threatens congressional oversight prerogatives. Last year the OLC issued an opinion finding that a subpoena from the House Foreign Affairs Committee to Secretary of State Anthony Blinken was invalid because it required him to testify at a time when he had important diplomatic meetings in New York on his schedule. The idea that congressional subpoenas are invalid whenever the executive branch believes it has more important things to do is a novel and dangerous one. (Indeed, no less an authority than Paul Colborn, a recently retired veteran of OLC, has publicly expressed concerns about the threat this opinion poses to congressional oversight).

Enhancing the website would be a small step toward goals articulated during the 2021 hearings of the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. Legal Scholars told the committee that Congress should consider establishing a "Congressional OLC" to articulate Congress's institutional prerogatives, to counter legal theories advanced by the Justice

Department and OLC, and to inform the executive branch of Congress's oversight expectations. This proposal led to a GAO study published in December 2023 on the feasibility of establishing such a congressional legal office.

OGC began in the late 1970s through the General Counsel to the Clerk, who provided many of the same functions as the statutorily established Senate Legal Counsel. OGC was first formally recognized by rule in 1993, but that rule simply established an Office of General Counsel "for the purpose of providing legal assistance and representation to the House," which was to "be provided without regard to political affiliation." The rule also provided that OGC "shall function pursuant to the direction of the Speaker, who shall consult with a Bipartisan Legal Advisory Group, which shall include the majority and minority leaderships." This rule remains to this day the primary source of OGC's authority and responsibilities, although subsequent statutory enactments provide some additional minor details about its functions and administration. See 2 U.S.C. § 5571 (authorizing automatic pro hac vice admission for OGC lawyers to state and federal courts and requiring the Attorney General to notify OGC, among other congressional officials, of a determination not to defend the constitutionality of a federal law).

For the most part, therefore, OGC's functions and methods of operation have been developed through practice and informal understandings over time. Many of OGC's functions and practices are obscure even to most members and staff of the House, much less to the general public. As for BLAG, during my tenure the only formal existence of that body consisted of the single reference in the House rule establishing OGC. Since that time, the House rules have been

amended to provide that BLAG “speaks for, and articulates the institutional position of, the House in all litigation matters,” but there is to my knowledge no public information about how BLAG exercises that responsibility, whether it meets regularly (or at all), whether there are any rules governing its deliberations, or anything else about its activities.

Unlike the Senate Legal Counsel, OGC has no mandated public-facing or educational role. OGC does have a public website, but it currently provides relatively little information regarding its activities. Since the last time I testified on this subject, the website has been improved in one significant respect- it has a “Recent Notable Cases” tab which provides links to some important filings that the OGC has made in the last two years. However, useful information that was previously on the website, including filings and court rulings in areas of the law most relevant to OGC’s practice, is no longer available. Perhaps this information is now behind the “For Congressional Offices” tab that is not accessible to the public.

The only information on BLAG on the website currently can be found in the footnotes of OGC briefs, which reflect whether BLAG has voted to authorize the filing and, if so, whether the vote was unanimous or on a party line vote. At a minimum, it would be useful to have a list of all public BLAG votes on the website.

Recommendation

It is in the public interest to understand how OGC and BLAG operate and fulfill the important functions they are given under the House rules. It is also in the House's interest to educate the public regarding the substance of the positions that it has taken on important legal controversies of the day and to provide some balance to legal arguments made by executive branch lawyers at the Office of Legal Counsel and elsewhere. While the House cannot compete on an even playing field with the legal resources of the executive branch, it can take modest steps to improve its outreach and communicate more effectively with the public.

Accordingly, I urge the subcommittee to ensure that OGC's funding for FY 2026 is adequate to enhance its capacity to improve its public website and provide important legal information to the public. OGC should be directed to expand its website to provide non-privileged information about its legal advice and representation, including court filings, legal opinions, and select explanatory or historical documents that would shed light on its operations and the legal views of the House. A good place to start would be with the "For Congressional Offices" tab, which undoubtedly has a good deal of information that is public or can easily be made so. The website should also include basic information about BLAG, such as a description of what BLAG is, who serves on it, how it functions, and instances when BLAG authorizes or directs OGC to take a legal position.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

**CASEWORK SUPPORT, REMOTE VOTING CAPABILITY,
AND AI TRAINING**

WITNESS

**DANIELLE STEWART, ADVISOR FOR CONGRESSIONAL INITIATIVES,
POPVOX FOUNDATION**

Mr. VALADAO. I now recognize Ms. Stewart for her 3 minutes.

STATEMENT OF DANIELLE STEWART

Ms. STEWART. Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Vice Chair Moore, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am Danielle Stewart, a former House chief of staff and modernization staffer now serving with the bipartisan POPVOX Foundation. Our team of former legislative-branch staffers and public servants works to strengthen congressional capacity while ensuring the responsible use of taxpayer funds.

Today, I would like to highlight three priority items for the committee's consideration.

First, we recommend a feasibility study within the CAO to establish a House Casework Support Office.

Congressional offices are facing unprecedented surges in constituent requests for help with Federal agencies, some seeing double- or triple-digit increases. Through our Casework Navigator Program, which provides training, resource-sharing, and a regular newsletter to support caseworkers, we have heard firsthand how this increase is straining staff and office resources.

A centralized office could collect and share up-to-date agency contacts and best practices, serve as a clearinghouse for policy changes, provide referrals to existing CAO services, and build tools to identify systemic agency issues. This would be a natural extension of successful staff development initiatives like the CAO's Coach program and the House HR Hub.

A feasibility study would be a logical next step.

Second, our team supports further exploration of remote-voting technology in the House. This effort is not about excusing absences. It is about ensuring continuity of operations during emergencies or when in-person gatherings become impossible.

Other major legislatures, including Canada and the U.K., have implemented secure remote-voting options for their members. As national-security threats evolve, Congress must maintain its ability to vote and exercise its Article I responsibilities even if Members cannot physically convene in the Capitol.

Finally, we recommend in-house development of AI training resources for Members and staff. With network traffic data suggesting that a quarter of House staff regularly use AI, there is an urgent need for institutional guidance.

An optional in-house curriculum through the Congressional Staff Academy could provide courses on ethical AI usage, ensure all offices have access to practical guidance, and offer sandbox sessions for safe experimentation with these tools.

In recent years, the House has made important strides in modernization and staff support. These three initiatives—casework support, remote voting capability, and AI training—would further enhance congressional operations and responsiveness to constituents and keep the legislative branch competitive in a rapidly evolving society.

Thank you for your consideration. The POPVOX Foundation stands ready to provide any additional information or support.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Ms. Stewart.

[The information follows:]

**Testimony Related to the Establishment of a House Casework Support Office, Continued
Support of Institutional Modernization, and Further Exploration and Investment in
Remote Voting Technology**

**Submitted by Danielle Stewart of POPVOX Foundation for the
House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch Fiscal Year 2026**

Dear Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the House Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am Danielle Stewart, a former House Chief of Staff and modernization staffer, now serving with the bipartisan POPVOX Foundation. Our team of bipartisan former Legislative branch staffers and public servants is dedicated to strengthening Congressional capacity and ensuring the responsible use of taxpayer funds.

I am submitting this testimony today to highlight support for the following priority items:

1. A feasibility study for establishing a House Casework Support Office.
2. Further exploration and investment in remote voting technology.
3. In-house development of AI training and resources for Members and staff.

I. Feasibility Study for a House Casework Support Office

Casework is one of Congress's most tangible constituent services. Over the past several months, offices have reported sharp increases in requests for help with federal agencies—some offices seeing double- or triple-digit spikes in new inquiries. Congressional offices are handling sudden waves of complex questions about benefits, immigration, and veterans' services as changes quickly take shape throughout the executive branch. These inquiries place a strain on limited staff resources and underscore the need for institutional support.

Our team at POPVOX Foundation operates the Casework Navigator program, which provides training, resource-sharing, and a regular newsletter to support caseworkers. We frequently learn about major agency trends from caseworkers directly—sometimes long before that information reaches leadership in Congress. We believe the House would benefit from a centralized office that could:

- Collect and disseminate up-to-date agency contacts, casework best practices, and training.
- Serve as a clearinghouse for timely updates on agency programs and policy changes.
- Provide “concierge” referrals to existing CAO business units that offer relevant services.
- Build data tools that help offices identify systemic agency issues.

A feasibility study within the CAO would be a logical next step. The House has successfully established several offices focused on staff development, such as the Coach Program, House HR Hub, and the House Intern Resource Office. A Casework Support Office is a natural extension of these efforts, providing critical institutional knowledge and collaboration to help Members serve constituents more efficiently.

II. Further Exploration and Investment in Remote Voting Technology

Voting is a core responsibility of Members, but currently, no House system exists that would allow for secure remote voting in emergencies. This issue is not about excusing absences; it is about ensuring continuity of operations when unforeseen disasters, conflicts, or future pandemics make in-person convenings impossible. Other major legislatures have successfully introduced remote or proxy voting options. For example, the Canadian House of Commons now uses a secure app that allows Members to vote remotely under extenuating circumstances. And the UK

House of Commons allows Members to appoint a proxy in limited cases, such as new parenthood or medical complications.

As threats to national security evolve, it is vital for Congress to have the ability to vote swiftly—even if Members cannot physically gather in the Capitol. Exploring the costs and feasibility of a secure remote voting system is a prudent investment to safeguard continuity and ensure the House remains a modern, resilient workplace.

III. In-House Creation of AI Professional Development

The House has shown commendable leadership in adopting policies that encourage responsible AI use. Many legislatures are moving quickly to integrate AI into daily operations, and the House is already piloting new AI tools and refining institutional guidance.

To keep pace with this rapid technological change, staff and Members would benefit from in-house training. An in-house AI training curriculum, ideally managed by the CAO's Congressional Staff Academy, could:

- Provide optional courses on best practices for secure and ethical AI usage.
- Ensure all offices—especially smaller ones—can access practical guidance on these emerging tools.
- Offer “sandbox” sessions so staff can experiment safely with AI platforms, learning how to incorporate them into daily workflows.

In the last few years, Congress has taken proactive steps to “meet the moment” seen by the growth in AI in nearly every sector worldwide. As these developments occur, our team has produced reports on the adoption of AI in legislatures around the world. With the average age of Congressional staff hovering around 31 years old, the House is host to many early adopters of

this new technology. Internal scans of House network traffic suggest that up to a quarter of the chamber's staff are already using some form of generative AI regularly. And as seen in the recent spike in users worldwide of the Chinese-owned DeepSeek AI platform, the development of secure AI usage and robust policy within the halls of government is at a critical juncture.

As chiefs of staff, staff directors, and office managers face the necessary task of helping their staff navigate the smart adoption of these new tools, the development of optional House-approved training on AI usage would empower Members, staff, and interns with access to up-to-date guidance and knowledge on these platforms, paving the way for continued innovation in the Legislative branch and more modern representation for the American people.

Conclusion

The House has made important strides in modernization and staff support in recent years. A feasibility study for a House Casework Support Office would help address the increasing demands on staff and enhance oversight of federal agencies. Continued research into secure remote voting technology would ensure continuity of operations during national emergencies. Finally, investing in AI training will keep Congress competitive and responsive to the challenges of a rapidly evolving society.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. POPVOX Foundation stands ready to provide any further information or support.

Respectfully submitted,

Danielle Stewart

POPVOX Foundation

Mr. VALADAO. I will see if any of my colleagues here have any questions for this panel.

Well, you are excused, and thank you for your time today.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A HOUSE CHIEF DATA OFFICER

WITNESS

NICHOLAS HART, PRESIDENT AND CEO, DATA FOUNDATION

Mr. VALADAO. I would like to ask the third panel to come up.

Mr. Hart, I now recognize you for your 3 minutes.

STATEMENT OF NICHOLAS HART

Mr. HART. Thank you to the subcommittee for the opportunity to testify today. And thank you also to the staff for coordinating with all of the witnesses. I very much appreciate the opportunity to be with you.

I am Nick Hart, president and CEO of the Data Foundation. We are a national nonprofit that advocates for open data and evidence-informed policy and decision-making.

I am here today representing our community, which includes our data coalition members and many, many partners who support responsible data access, effective data governance, and meaningful data transparency across the whole of government, including the legislative branch. And I want to recognize also that many of the witnesses today have also acknowledged these issues in their commentary.

I urge Congress strongly to create and establish a Chief Data Officer function within the legislative branch as part of the current appropriations process.

Back in 2018, Congress passed legislation requiring executive-branch agencies to do so as part of the Open Government Data Act, and that was signed by President Trump at the time. Congress should apply these same principles here in the legislative branch under Article I.

It is a low-cost mechanism that helps ensure Congress has the information it needs to effectively and efficiently legislate. And it is a way of focusing on the data on the systems, not just the systems themselves.

It is not about creating more bureaucracy or not even a way of criticizing the excellent expertise of the congressional staff today, but a way to ensure that Congress has access and availability to information that it needs and can coordinate across the entirety of the congressional enterprise when it comes to data.

The current lack of this enterprise-wide data governance strategy creates some real problems, and I think some of those have even been acknowledged today so far.

When developing legislation, congressional offices repeatedly request the same information and analyses, creating some duplication, even some delays.

During the appropriations process, offices may struggle to analyze the immense volume of data, including performance informa-

tion provided by agencies to the legislative branch. And other offices may not even be aware of some of that performance information that comes in about outputs, efficiency measures, and eventually the outcomes.

A congressional CDO can help coordinate this existing data function without replacing a lot of the great work that is already happening.

Highlighting a couple of the key benefits that we see: developing a data catalog, a way of knowing what data exists across the institution of Congress; establishing protocols for appropriate and responsible effective executive-legislative data-sharing while respecting constitutional principles; enabling new privacy-preserving technologies that are becoming very common in many parts of government today to help us protect sensitive information; supporting implementation of new laws from the last Congress like the CBO Data Sharing Act; and even creating machine-readable formats.

We think this is a modest investment that leads to some substantial returns that are not just symbolic, not just cultural, but lead to action. Our research shows that quality data systems pay for themselves through improved services and reduced waste.

We strongly encourage Congress to establish an enterprise-wide Chief Data Officer. And thank you for your consideration.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Hart.

[The information follows:]



**Written Statement from Nicholas (Nick) Hart, Ph.D.,
President & CEO of the Data Foundation**

**For the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Legislative Branch
"Hearing on the FY 2026 Legislative Branch Appropriations"**

April 9, 2025

Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing about the FY 2026 Legislative Branch Appropriations. I am Nick Hart, President & CEO of the Data Foundation, a national non-profit organization that works to improve government, business, and society through open data and evidence-informed public policy. The Data Foundation champions using accessible, high-quality data to make society better for everyone.

Creating a Chief Data Officer for Congress. For FY 2026, I urge Congress to establish a Chief Data Officer (CDO) function for the Legislative Branch. This senior role would coordinate data governance across Congress, establishing standards for data quality, accessibility, privacy protection, and interoperability, while respecting the independence of institutional units. The position would serve as a central point of coordination for data-related activities across House and Senate offices, committees, and support agencies.

A CDO at the enterprise-level in Congress, would build upon Congress's vision when it established CDO roles for federal executive branch agencies in the OPEN Government Data Act (Title II of P.L. 115-435), offering an opportunity for Congress to further strengthen its leadership through consistent application of these data governance principles within its own operations. While there have been ongoing systems dialogues, there is a need to ensure data governance across organizational units, committees, and member offices can be distinctly prioritized, just as IT systems and budgets receive guidance and support.

The CDO role would not replace existing data functions in Government Accountability Office (GAO), Congressional Budget Office (CBO), or committee offices,

but rather coordinate and enhance their effectiveness while reducing duplication of effort. As agencies across the Executive Branch have demonstrated, a CDO can drive significant improvements in efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness.

Building on Existing Legislative Branch Data Resources. Several legislative branch entities already perform critical data functions, including the GAO, CBO, and joint committees such as the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT), which has long worked in a collaborative and coordinated fashion to use—and protect—sensitive tax data under Title 26. The Data Foundation strongly supports adequate resources for the GAO, CBO, and Joint Committees, such as JCT. These entities serve as trusted intermediaries that transform complex data into actionable insights for policymaking in Congress.

The Data Foundation is particularly proud of our partnership with GAO's Center for Evaluation Methods and Issues (CEMI) to support the evaluation community through joint initiatives that promote methodological rigor, quality standards, and a strong community of practice. As both an appointed member of the Comptroller General's Advisory Council on Government Auditing Standards (Yellow Book Advisory Council) and longtime supporter of institutional data governance practices, I deeply respect and appreciate GAO's leadership in establishing its own CDO role in recent years, as well as a unit that prioritizes statistical activities, and an emerging focus on evaluation methods.

Parallel Initiatives to Enhance Congressional Data Governance. With a Legislative Branch CDO in place, Congress could simultaneously pursue several parallel initiatives to enhance its data governance:

- *Developing a Legislative Branch Data Catalog:* A comprehensive inventory and catalog of Congress's institutional data assets would provide transparency about what information exists, where it resides, and how it can be appropriately accessed. This would specifically focus on shared resources such as committee hearing records, GAO reports, CBO analyses, legislative histories, and other data resources that belong to Congress as an institution—not individual offices' constituent casework or correspondence systems. This catalog would mirror requirements for Executive Branch agencies and would enable more efficient information sharing and use while maintaining appropriate privacy safeguards.
- *Establishing Data Governance Practices:* A legislative branch-wide data strategy would outline how Congress can better collect, manage, share, and use data to

support its constitutional functions. This would include shared practices for data quality, security, and accessibility.

- *Supporting Executive-Legislative Branch Data Sharing:* Effective systems for accessing and collaborating with the Executive Branch on data are essential. In some cases, re-collecting information is burdensome or costly. But under the separation of powers—and the privacy protections afforded to the American people—we should not assume it is an inherent right for individual members of Congress, their staff, or even designees in support agencies to have unfettered access without defined purposes to data about the American people and businesses. A Congressional CDO could help establish protocols and systems for appropriate data sharing between branches that respect constitutional principles and privacy protections while meeting Congress's legitimate information needs.
- *Implementing Privacy-Preserving Technologies:* Low-cost pilot programs could explore privacy-preserving technologies for constituent services. Modern approaches like privacy-preserving record linkage and secure multi-party computation would allow Congress to connect datasets across committees and offices without exposing sensitive details, potentially improving service delivery while maintaining confidentiality.

The Need for Enhanced Data Governance in Congress. In 2018, Congress passed the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, including Title II, the OPEN Government Data Act, which required agencies across the Executive Branch to designate Chief Data Officers (CDOs) and implement data governance practices. This law recognized data as a strategic asset for the government. Congress has already seen the benefits of this approach, with Executive Branch agencies better managing data assets, improving data quality, and enhancing the use of data for decision-making.

However, despite Congress establishing these functions for the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch has an opportunity to apply similar data governance principles to improve its own operations. The practical impacts of the current approach to data management are felt daily across congressional functions:

1. *Legislative Development Inefficiency:* When developing legislation, Congressional offices frequently request similar datasets and analyses from support agencies. A CDO could establish a searchable repository of previously requested analyses,

allowing staff to build upon existing work rather than starting from scratch, reducing duplication of effort and wait times.

2. *Budget Transparency Challenges:* The appropriations process generates immense volumes of data that individual offices struggle to analyze effectively. A Congressional CDO could develop standardized tools and machine-readable formats that would empower offices to make more informed budget decisions and better communicate funding impacts to constituents.
3. *Agency Accountability Challenges:* Individual offices fulfilling their accountability responsibilities often lack the tools to validate the accuracy and completeness of agency-provided data. A Congressional CDO could establish data quality assessment frameworks and cross-agency data concordances that would transform accountability from reliance on agency self-reporting to evidence-based assessment.
4. *Constituent Service Coordination:* During crises like natural disasters, individual congressional offices lack standardized ways to access and analyze critical assistance data. A Congressional CDO could create standardized data dashboards and secure information-sharing protocols between affected offices, enabling more responsive and effective constituent services, while protecting privacy and confidentiality of constituents.

As highlighted in the Data Foundation's "Data and Evidence Policy Trends: 10 Government Transformations for 2025," developed in partnership with our Data Coalition members, establishing robust data verification and trust frameworks has become increasingly vital. Congress has the opportunity to lead by example by implementing community-driven approaches to verifying and assessing data quality across its operations.

Immediate Opportunities for Congressional Data Improvement. With a Congressional CDO in place, several immediate, low-cost opportunities could be pursued to enhance data transparency and use:

- *Effectively Implementing the CBO Data Sharing Act:* The Congressional Budget Office Data Sharing Act (P.L. 118-89) authorized CBO to access necessary data from executive agencies more efficiently. Implementing this law effectively, with strong and transparent privacy safeguards, is essential. The Data Foundation

appreciates Congress's support for this initiative and encourages continued oversight of its implementation.

- *Publishing Congressional Budget Justifications*: Congress should implement for itself the standards established in the Congressional Budget Justification Transparency Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-40), which required Executive Branch agencies to publish their budget justifications in structured data formats. Legislative Branch agencies and offices should make their budget justifications machine-readable, centrally accessible, and transparently available to the public, and provide reports to GPO for at least the previous ten years.
- *Machine-Readable Appropriations Information*: Legislative Branch appropriations data should be published in structured, machine-readable formats through CBO and other appropriate channels. This would enhance transparency, improve analysis, and support more efficient management of congressional resources.
- *Developing Data Readiness for AI*: As our Data Foundation's AI Policy Framework emphasizes, high-quality, well-governed data is essential for responsible AI use. By establishing strong data governance practices now, Congress would position itself to responsibly leverage AI technologies as they continue to evolve, while ensuring appropriate safeguards are in place.

Conclusion. As technologies rapidly evolve, perceptions about data access and use rapidly shift, and the decision-making needs in Congress continue to advance, Congress must decide whether it is willing to invest in a data infrastructure that can meet the needs of both the present and the future. Establishing a Chief Data Officer for Congress is the first step in this process.

Congress must lead in data governance and transparency efforts, just as it requires of the Executive Branch. Data Foundation research indicates quality data systems effectively pay for themselves through improved services, reduced waste, and other benefits. The returns on investment for data governance are clear and substantial.

Small but strategic investments in data governance now—beginning with creating a Chief Data Officer for Congress—will yield long-term benefits in the form of more effective and efficient operations, better-informed decision-making, transparency to the American public, and contribute to enhancements in public trust in the institution. The Data Foundation stands ready to support Congress in this important endeavor.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

**PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF NON-CONFIDENTIAL
CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE REPORTS**

WITNESS

ANTOINE McGRATH, CREATOR, CRSREPORTS.COM

Mr. VALADAO. Now I recognize Mr. McGrath for his 3 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ANTOINE McGRATH

Mr. McGRATH. Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and Vice Chairman Moore, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Antoine McGrath, and I am the creator of CRSReports.com, a public website which I built and maintain, starting in 2015 with help from like-minded friends, with the sole purpose of making Congressional Research Service reports more accessible to the public.

We had no institutional support or outside funding, just a shared belief that these taxpayer-funded materials should be freely available to the people who paid for them.

CRSReports.com made reports available to the public before any official site existed. Our work was later subsumed by EveryCRSReport.com, run by Daniel Schuman, and the support of Demand Progress. Together, we showed that publishing CRS reports at scale could be done quickly and efficiently.

Since then, Congress has passed the Equal Access to Congressional Research Service Reports Act, which requires public access to non-confidential CRS reports and funding for that effort.

The public portal to CRS reports hosted by Congress has done well and has informed the public of complex issues before Congress, but their work is not done. CRS has not released historical reports, tens of thousands of them, which remain locked away in the internal system known as CRSX. As a result, unofficial repositories, such as the ones that I created, serve more reports than CRS does itself.

Congress can use its authority to again direct CRS and the Library of Congress this time to work with GPO to release CRS reports to the public, with specific note that this includes historical unclassified reports. Public access to these in PDF format would suffice. This effort has been approved and funded by Congress.

Providing clarity around historical CRS reports is a high-impact step that fulfills the spirit of the law and benefits Congress, researchers, and the public. I respectfully urge the subcommittee to act.

Thank you again for your time.

Mr. VALADAO. We appreciate your comments, Mr. McGrath.
[The information follows:]

Written Testimony of Antoine McGrath

FY 2026 Legislative Branch Appropriations

Topic: Directing CRS to Release Historical Reports from its CRSX Archive

Submitted to: House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch

Date: April 4, 2025

Dear Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the public availability of non-confidential Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports. I respectfully urge the Subcommittee to include language in the FY 2026 Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill directing the Library of Congress and CRS to make historical CRS reports from the CRSX archive publicly accessible online in PDF format.

This request does not require new funding. It builds on longstanding congressional goals for increased transparency and public access to legislative branch research by ensuring that CRS's valuable historical work is made publicly available.

Why Historical CRS Reports Matter

The CRS is a taxpayer-funded, non-partisan agency that produces rigorous, fact-based research for Congress. Since the mid-20th century, CRS has generated thousands of non-confidential reports on nearly every aspect of federal policymaking, from budget reform to presidential powers to environmental policy. These reports are indispensable

to understanding the legislative process, the evolution of federal law, and the context for congressional action.

Congress recognized the value of this work when it enacted the Equal Access to Congressional Research Service Reports Act of 2018, requiring the publication of non-confidential reports available on CRS's intranet. Yet the law did not stop there—it also gave the Library of Congress the authority to publish historical reports that were not available on CRS's intranet at the time. That authority has yet to be exercised.

The CRSX Archive: Digitized, Funded, and Off-Limits

CRS has internally acknowledged that it possesses a separate archive—the CRSX system—containing more than 30,000 historical CRS reports. Many of these reports are already digitized and include metadata, yet they are not available to either Congress or the public.

In its FY 2021 report, this Subcommittee wisely directed CRS to evaluate and report on the feasibility of publishing the CRSX archive. While CRS cited a potential \$2.4 million cost and 40 FTEs for a one-year effort, such estimates appear inflated. The resource I created—CRSReports.com—was built, hosted, and funded entirely by me. It became public in 2015 and made thousands more CRS reports publicly accessible than are available on the official CRS website today, all at a fraction of the projected cost. If the true cost of making these reports public is indeed a concern, CRS should be directed to collaborate with the Government Publishing Office (GPO), which has significant experience publishing government reports efficiently and at scale.

The Time for Access is Now

Historical CRS reports are not obsolete. They continue to inform congressional debate and are essential for understanding legislative history.

These reports were funded by the taxpayers and produced for Congress. They should not be locked behind an internal wall or accessible only through expensive commercial databases. Public release of these materials in PDF format would represent a major step toward transparency and accountability in line with congressional intent.

Recommendations

I respectfully urge the Subcommittee to take the following actions:

- Direct the Library of Congress and CRS to release all non-confidential historical reports stored in the CRSX archive.
- Require the reports to be published online in PDF format.
- Encourage CRS to collaborate with GPO to reduce costs and accelerate release.

Making historical CRS reports available online is a low-cost, high-impact reform that will benefit Congress and the public alike. Thank you for considering this request and for your continued leadership on strengthening the legislative branch.

Respectfully submitted,

Antoine McGrath

Creator of CRSReports.com (2015)

Antoine@crsreports.com

(315) 683-4268

Mr. VALADAO. Any questions from my colleagues up here?

Well, you guys are excused. Thank you very much for your time.

All right. If there are no further questions, I would like to thank all of our witnesses for being here today.

Members may submit additional questions for the record.

Mr. VALADAO. And the committee now stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:40 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

[The information follows:]

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Legislative Branch*Written Testimony of Dr. David Andrew Weinberg (Policy Strategist at Protect Democracy)*

“FY 2026 Public Witness” for April 9, 2025

Dear Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and distinguished members of the House Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on strengthening efforts by legislative agencies to protect Members of Congress, their staff, and their families. You and your colleagues do essential work for the American people, and you should never have to fear that this public service could endanger you, your employees, or your loved ones. Unfortunately, threats of this sort are at perilously high levels, including in ways that could be degrading the legislative branch’s effectiveness. For this reason, relevant security programs by the U.S. Capitol Police Department, the Architect of the Capitol, and the Sergeants at Arms should be robustly funded. At the same time, helping these efforts succeed requires greater transparency to lawmakers and the general public from the agencies that administer these them.

The levels of threats faced by Members of Congress and their staff have increased considerably in just the last decade. In 2016, the U.S. Capitol Police recorded an estimated 902 threatening communications directed at Members of Congress.¹ However, the number of concerning statements and direct threats against Members of Congress in 2024 was more than ten times that level and has remained close to this higher range for every year starting in 2020.² Unfortunately, the initial data from 2025 is not looking encouraging, either. On the contrary, the subset of these communications that are considered most severe reportedly spiked to much higher

¹ Letter from House Sergeant at Arms Paul Irving to Federal Election Commission Chairman Steven T. Walther, June 21, 2017, <https://www.fec.gov/files/legal/aos/83377.pdf>

² U.S. Capitol Police, “USCP Threat Assessment Cases for 2024,” Feb. 3, 2025, <https://www.uscp.gov/media-center/press-releases/uscp-threat-assessment-cases-2024>

levels in January and February of 2025 compared to those same months in 2024.³

This acute threat environment has harmful consequences for many of the public servants who staff the legislative branch. A survey of senior Congressional staff published last year found alarmingly high rates of respondents who said that they experience “anxiety and/or fear about accompanying the Member to public events” (40%), “anxiety about the safety of my colleagues” (63%), and/or “anxiety for the safety of my Member” (74%).⁴ Levels in all three of these categories were even higher among Democratic respondents. Additionally, more than a quarter of respondents – with similar levels from both parties – reported that they “frequently” or “very frequently” have been questioning whether to keep working for Congress due to safety concerns.⁵

The personal toll of this environment can be heavy for those who work here in other ways as well. For instance, “when it comes to safety and security, I have to think constantly and frequently much more than ever before,” said a chief of staff to then-Rep. Dan Kildee (D, MI).⁶ “It traumatized my kids,” said former Rep. Tom Reed (R, NY).⁷ “I just don’t feel safe anymore,” said Rep. Norma Torres (D, CA), who reportedly moved homes after an incident at her residence.⁸

Particularly worrisome for our democracy is the extent to which these threats may constrain the ability of some lawmakers to vote their conscience without fear of physical harm, either to themselves or to those they care about. It has allegedly been a factor in some of the absolute most

³ Pema Levy, “Violent Threats against Members of Congress Spiked as Senate Considered Trump’s Nominees: Exclusive Capitol Police Data Shows that Threats Doubled this January and February,” *Mother Jones*, Mar. 25, 2025, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2025/03/violent-threats-congress-donald-trump-data/>

⁴ Kathy Goldschmidt, *State of the Congress 2024: An Assessment of the Civility, Functionality, and Capacity of the 118th Congress by Senior Congressional Staff*, Congressional Management Foundation (Mar. 27, 2024), p. 25, https://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF_Pubs/cmf_state_of_the_congress_2024.pdf

⁵ *Id.*, p. 27.

⁶ Scott MacFarlane, “How Top Congressional Aides are Addressing Increased Fears They Have for Safety of Lawmakers and their Staff,” *CBS News*, May 20, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/congressional-aides-increased-fear-for-safety-of-lawmakers-staff/>

⁷ Sarah D. Wire, “Threats against Members of Congress Are Skyrocketing. It’s Changing the Job,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sep. 20, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-09-20/threats-members-of-congress>

⁸ *Id.*

important decisions for some Members, including with regard to the confirmation of cabinet nominees,⁹ the impeachment¹⁰ or indictment¹¹ of a president, the counting of states' electoral votes,¹² the extent of Members' constituent engagement,¹³ or their retirement from office.¹⁴

Several of the legislative support agencies this subcommittee oversees administer crucial programs that help mitigate some of these security threats. This includes many different functions of the U.S. Capitol Police, such as increased hiring, procurement, and planning in order to better protect the Capitol complex;¹⁵ increased protective details and escorts at DC area airports;¹⁶ expanded intelligence capabilities to monitor for threats;¹⁷ and regional field offices to investigate

⁹ Levy, 'Violent Threats'.

¹⁰ Zack Beauchamp, "The Capitol Hill Mob Wanted to Intimidate Congress. It's Working.: After Receiving Death Threats, Republicans Say They're Afraid to Vote to Impeach," *Vox*, Jan. 13, 2021,

<https://www.vox.com/2021/1/13/22229052/capitol-hill-riot-intimidate-legislators>; Colby Hall, "Liz Cheney: GOP Members of Congress Told Her They Voted NOT to Impeach Trump Due to Personal Security Concerns," *Mediaite*, Jun 7, 2021, <https://www.mediaite.com/tv/liz-cheney-gop-members-of-congress-told-her-they-voted-not-to-impeach-trump-due-to-personal-security-concerns/>

¹¹ McKay Coppins, "What Mitt Romney Saw in the Senate," *The Atlantic*, Sep. 13, 2023,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/11/mitt-romney-retiring-senate-trump-mcconnell/675306/>

¹² Zachary Evans, "GOP Rep. Claims Colleagues Objected to Election Results for Fear Their Families Would Be Harmed," *National Review*, Jan. 12, 2021, <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/gop-rep-claims-colleagues-objected-to-election-results-for-fear-their-families-would-be-harmed/>; Aaron Blake, "The role of violent threats in Trump's GOP reign, according to Republicans," *Washington Post*, Dec. 11, 2021,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/12/11/republicans-repeatedly-point-violent-threats-key-trumps-gop-rein/>

¹³ Danny Hakim, Ken Bensinger, and Eileen Sullivan, "'We'll See You at Your House': How Fear and Menace Are Transforming Politics," *New York Times*, May 19, 2024, updated May 20, 2024,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/19/us/politics/political-violence.html>; Candice Norwood and Mariel Padilla, "'I Don't Feel Safe'," *The 19th*, Jan. 5, 2022, <https://19thnews.org/2022/01/january-6-congress-women-safety/>; Jobin Panicker, "North Texas congressman postpones town hall, cites threats of violence after heated D.C. exchange," *WFAA News*, Mar. 14, 2025, <https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/local/texas-congressman-postpones-town-hall-reports-threats-of-violence-following-heated-exchange-in-dc/287-f94f4a22-c522-4145-a7a9-8302686d777b>;

Andrew Graham and Joshua Wolfson, "Hageman cancels in-person town halls, opts for virtual events citing safety concerns," *WyoFile*, Mar. 25, 2025, <https://wyofile.com/hageman-cancels-in-person-town-halls-opts-for-virtual-events-citing-safety-concerns/>

¹⁴ Jonathan Martin, "Ohio House Republican, Calling Trump 'a Cancer,' Bows Out of 2022," *New York Times*, Sep. 16, 2021, updated Nov. 2, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/16/us/politics/anthony-gonzalez-ohio-trump.html>

¹⁵ Testimony of U.S. Capitol Police Chief J. Thomas Manger to the House Committee on Appropriations, Mar. 25, 2025, p. 5, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP24/20250325/118041/HHRG-119-AP24-20250325-SD002.pdf>

¹⁶ Testimony of U.S. Capitol Police Chief J. Thomas Manger to the Committee on House Administration, Mar. 21, 2024, p. 5, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/HA/HA00/20240321/117006/HHRG-118-HA00-Wstate-MangerT-20240321.pdf>

¹⁷ *Id.*

those threats.¹⁸ It also includes discrete programs by the Architect of the Capitol or the Sergeants at Arms, such as hardening facilities at both the Capitol complex as well as district offices, giving security trainings in both places, and reimbursing some of Members' costs for home security.¹⁹

Officials have sought - and received - permission several times from the Federal Elections Commission for lawmakers to use campaign funds for a broadening range of security expenditures over the years.²⁰ The use of campaign funds for these purposes has therefore skyrocketed in the last decade.²¹ But the need for these services still far outstrips Members' ability to procure them.

First, Congress should further increase its spending to protect Members and their staff. For example, Members outside of leadership typically do not receive full-time protective services; they can request it but need may still exceed availability.²² Members may be unable to cover these expenses themselves, which was part of why the FEC recently authorized the wider use of campaign funds for security expenses, with the chair raising concern that less affluent individuals "are put in the position of making a choice of risking their safety, or their families' safeties, in order to try to run for federal office."²³ But the updated guidelines still cover only certain security costs; even tapping into campaign budgets may be inadequate to meet some lawmakers' needs.

¹⁸ Katherine Tully-McManus, "Inside how the Capitol Police has changed since Jan. 6, 2021," *Politico*, Dec. 25, 2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/12/25/capitol-police-change-since-jan-6-00195947>

¹⁹ Testimony of House Sergeant at Arms William McFarland to House Appropriations Subcommittee on Legislative Branch, Apr. 17, 2024, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP24/20240417/117121/HHRG-118-AP24-Wstate-McFarlandW-20240417.pdf>; Tarinelli and Papp, "Staffers Bear the Brunt of Threats Aimed at District Offices," *Roll Call*, May 29, 2024, <https://rollcall.com/2024/05/29/staffers-bear-brunt-threats-congress-district-offices/>

²⁰ Derek B. Johnson, FEC Expands Campaign Spending Rules to Allow for Physical, Cybersecurity Purchases," *CyberScoop*, Sep. 24, 2024, <https://cyberscoop.com/fec-campaign-funds-security-purchases/>

²¹ Russ Choma and Sinduja Rangarajan, "Members of Congress are Spending More than Ever on Security," *Mother Jones*, June 29, 2021, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2021/06/members-of-congress-are-spending-more-than-ever-on-security/>; Greg Morton, Marianna Sotomayor, and Camila DeChalus, "Lawmakers are Spending Way More to Keep Themselves Safe" *Washington Post*, Sep. 18, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/09/18/congress-security-spending-violence-threats/>

²² Darreonna Davis, "Why threats against members of Congress are driving more security spending," *The 19th*, Feb. 6, 2024, <https://19thnews.org/2024/02/threats-congress-women-security-spending/>; Choma and Rangarajan, "Spending More"; & McKay Coppins, "What Mitt Romney Saw in the Senate," *The Atlantic*, Sep. 13, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/11/mitt-romney-retiring-senate-trump-mcconnell/675306/>

²³ Zach Montellaro, "Threats against Politicians are Prevalent. The FEC Wants to Let Campaigns Pay for Security," *Politico*, Mar. 27, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/03/27/fec-regulation-security-costs-00149218>

Second, lawmakers deserve to have confidence that their safety will remain a priority regardless of their party or their position within it. That safeguards are in place at all levels to ensure decisions about threat investigations, security details, and other supports would never be allocated in an unfair or retaliatory manner, as recently occurred with security details revoked by the executive branch.²⁴ National security depends on public servants being secure to do their jobs.

Third, appropriators should require greater transparency about the nature of the threats to lawmakers and the programs to address them. This is not just a fair tradeoff for added funds, it also is essential for ensuring that funds get allocated effectively. For instance, USCP should be required to disclose for each year from 2017 onward not just the number of concerning statements and direct threats against Members, families, and staff, but also: the number of these that the USCP determined were credible threats; the number of investigations of these opened by the USCP; the number of investigations that resulted in criminal referral; the number of resulting prosecutions; and the number of convictions (subdivided between convictions in court versus plea agreements).

Last but by no means least, the security officers who provide lawmakers with these services deserve to be better paid, better supported, and better recognized for their sacrifices. The absolute minimum in this regard should include implementing the overdue requirement mandated by law to display a Congressional plaque (which reportedly has already been prepared) listing the names of all the police officers who heroically saved lawmakers' lives on January 6, 2021.²⁵ They do so much for our nation's legislature; this is the very least that we should be doing for them.

²⁴ "Fauci, Bolton, Pompeo: Full List of People Who Donald Trump Revoked Security Details For," *Newsweek*, Jan. 24, 2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/full-list-people-donald-trump-revoked-security-details-2020601>; Leo Shane, "Hegseth Strips Milley of Security Detail, Orders Investigation," *Military Times*, Jan. 29, 2025, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2025/01/29/hegseth-strips-milley-of-security-detail-orders-reason-investigation/>; Jaroslav Lukiv and Kayla Epstein, "Trump revokes security clearance for Harris, Clinton, and critics," *BBC News*, Mar. 22, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c74kg3e2m08o>

²⁵ Letter from Rep. Jason Crow et al. to Speaker Mike Johnson, Jan. 16, 2025, <https://crow.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/crow.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/Crow%20January%206%20Plaque%20FINAL.pdf>

**Testimony Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative
Branch, FY 2026, Concerning Gift Authority for the Government Publishing Office,
submitted by James R. Jacobs, US Government Information Librarian, Stanford
University**

Dear Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and distinguished members of
the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to address you and this committee today regarding
a matter concerning the efficiency, modernization, and public service mission of the
Government Publishing Office (GPO). My testimony advocates for a statutory change
granting GPO the explicit authority to accept gifts, bequests, and devices of both
monetary and nonmonetary property and distribute grants to libraries in the Federal
Depository Library Program (FDLP).

I am the US government information librarian at Stanford University and my
library's Federal Depository Library Program coordinator. Stanford has been an FDLP
member since 1895. As such, my everyday work is to build historic collections and offer
research services to students, faculty, staff and the general public in Santa Clara County
and increasingly across the country.

The authority of government agencies to accept gifts and distribute grants is
generally restricted without specific statutory authorization. As the Government
Accountability Office has noted, "without statutory authority, an individual government
agency may not accept gifts of goods or services for its own use".¹ However, other
legislative branch entities, such as the Library of Congress, and other federal entities
with missions concerning access to information, like the Smithsonian Institution and the

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/b-289903.pdf>

National Archives and Records Administration, possess such authority.² We recommend gift authority be extended to the GPO.

Providing gift authority to the GPO would yield several significant benefits:

1. Saving Taxpayer Money: Acceptance of gifts, bequests, and devises can provide GPO with resources beyond its appropriated budget. This could allow GPO to undertake valuable projects in collaboration with FDLP libraries and other organizations, invest in modernization efforts, and enhance its services without requiring additional taxpayer funds. For example, donations could support the digitization and description of historical documents in the "National Collection,"³ the development of new tools for public access, and the preservation of tangible collections.

2. Economy of Services: Nonmonetary gifts, such as in-kind services, equipment, or collections of historical materials, could significantly enhance GPO's operational capacity and resources. Accepting voluntary and uncompensated personal services, for example, could allow for the accession of digitized documents from FDLP libraries or assistance with adding metadata. Granting authority would be a virtuous loop to help to fund preservation and digitization projects in FDLP libraries which would then feed back into GPO's systems for the betterment of all American citizens. This could speed up the process by which materials are made publicly available and decrease the cost for doing so.

² See Library of Congress 2 USC § 160; Smithsonian Institution 22 USC § 75d; National Archives 44 USC § 2305.

³ <https://fdlp.gov/about-the-fdlp/the-national-collection>

3. Improving Public Access to Information: Enhanced resources through gift acceptance can directly translate to improved public access to government information. Donations and grants could fund initiatives to improve the online repository govinfo.gov, enhance cataloging and indexing services, or support Federal Depository Libraries in their mission to provide no-fee access to government information.

This is an issue that has been previously contemplated by Congress. Draft legislation released by Congress for public comment contained a provision regarding gift authority in section 563.⁴ It stated clearly:

The Public Printer may accept and use gifts and bequests of property (both real and personal) and services in support of the Superintendent's responsibilities under this chapter.

Section 109 of that bill provided for congressional oversight of the gifts and disclosure of gifts in semi-annual reports. This seems an appropriate framework.

There are few circumstances where Congress can have its cake and eat it too. Extending to GPO the authority to receive gifts and distribute grants could provide enormous benefits to the American people in terms of access to records and do so at no cost to taxpayers. We respectfully request that you provide to GPO the same gift authority that is already available to other agencies who provide the public with access to government records. My recommendation would positively impact the work of the GPO, the 1100+ FDLP libraries and every citizen in every Congressional district.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further. Thank you for your interest and attention.

⁴ <https://freegovinfo.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/DRAFT-title44-reform-bill-12-11-17.pdf>

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2026

TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 2025.

JOHN C. STENNIS CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE TRAIN- ING AND DEVELOPMENT, OFFICE OF CONGRESSIONAL WORKPLACE RIGHTS, AND CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP

WITNESSES

**DR. BRIAN PUGH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOHN C. STENNIS CENTER
FOR PUBLIC SERVICE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

**MR. MARTIN CRANE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF CONGRES-
SIONAL WORKPLACE RIGHTS**

**MS. JANE SARGUS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE
FOR INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Mr. VALADAO. The subcommittee will come to order.

The subject of today's hearing is the fiscal year 2026 request for the Stennis Center for Public Service Training and Development, the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights, and the Congressional Office for International Leadership.

I would like to thank Ranking Member Espaillat, the committee members, and our agency executive directors for being here this morning.

While our smaller agencies do not traditionally testify every budget cycle, we wanted to invite you back to provide an introduction to the work you do and the work you and your teams do for the new members of our subcommittee.

The Stennis Center for Public Service Training and Development, while being the oldest of the three agencies here today, continues to submit a flat funding request for \$430,000 for fiscal year 2026. The Office of Congressional Workplace Rights requests \$8.6 million, an increase of nearly 5.5 percent. And, finally, the Congressional Office for International Leadership's fiscal year 2026 request is \$7.2 million, a 20 percent increase.

I look forward to your testimony.

And I now yield to Ranking Member Espaillat, Mr. Espaillat, for his opening remarks.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Thank you, Chairman Valadao.

Ms. Sargus, Dr. Pugh, and Mr. Crane, thank you all for testifying today on behalf of your respective agencies.

Your agencies continue to play a vital role in advancing workplace rights and providing future leaders with the tools that are required, really, to develop and support democracy across the world.

As the first Dominican American to serve in Congress, I understand and continue to be encouraged by the international outreach of COIL to share accountable governance and citizenship diplomacy. Now, more than ever, I believe that it is vital to maintain our connection with global partners to exchange best practices.

As General Mattis once told the current President, if we don't spend money on countries across the world, we are going to need to buy more bullets. And so we don't want to buy more bullets. We want to make sure that we encourage democracy across the world.

And the Stennis Center also has been instrumental in connecting new generations to the public service workplace.

So thank you so much for being here, and I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Espailat.

Dr. Pugh, your full testimony has been submitted for the record, and you are now recognized to provide a summary of your written testimony.

STATEMENT OF DR. BRIAN PUGH

Mr. PUGH. Good morning, Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espailat, and members of the subcommittee. I am Brian Pugh, the executive director of the Stennis Center for Public Service Training and Development, and I am honored to speak to you today about the Stennis Center's \$430,000 appropriations request that funds our congressional program.

The Stennis Center was established in 1988 with the statutory mission to, one, promote public service to young people and to get them interested in a career in public service; two, to provide training and professional development opportunities to State and local elected officials and their staff; and, three, to provide training and professional development opportunities to congressional staff.

We are overseen by a board of trustees that are required by law to be appointed by House and Senate leadership.

Our programs that meet the third prong of our mission are known as our Congressional Programs. Because the Stennis Center's request is for expenses related to these programs, I will focus on discussing those.

The Congressional Programs consist of the following: the Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program, Emerging Leaders Program, and the Stennis Program for Congressional Interns.

The Stennis Center is requesting level funding, which is \$430,000. The Stennis Center strives to present the highest quality programs for congressional staff at the lowest possible cost.

The Center has been operating on the same funding level for multiple years now. The appropriations request for fiscal year 2026 is essential to enable the Stennis Center to continue to provide training and development opportunities to congressional staff as mandated by its authorizing legislation. Without the appropriation, the highly successful Congressional Programs will be severely reduced, if not eliminated.

As I noted, the Stennis Center is requesting level funding. The Stennis Center has been able to keep level funding despite increased costs because of two main strategies.

The first strategy has been to consistently evaluate ways that we can save money without substantially impacting the quality of the programs. The money saved can then be used in other ways that improve our programs or offset rising costs.

One of my proudest cost-saving measures has been our recent move to the Library of Congress.

At the beginning of the 2025 fiscal year, the Stennis Center moved from a leased space in a private office building to the Adams Building at the Library of Congress.

If you factor in the savings from services such as utilities and parking, the total yearly saving is almost \$50,000, which is equivalent to 11.5 percent of our budget request.

However, this is not the only benefit to moving to the Library. Because it is so much larger than the Stennis Center, the Library can potentially provide us with services that would otherwise cost us more if we were to contract out on an ad hoc basis. These conversations are currently ongoing.

While our move to the Library is the most noteworthy example of cost savings, I would like to provide a couple examples of how we have adjusted our programs to save costs while maintaining their high quality.

One example is the cost of food and refreshments for the Stennis Intern Program. While I am a big believer in southern hospitality and always having food for your guests, we decided in 2022 to cut back on food that we provided to the program.

This allowed us to go from hosting the Stennis Intern Program once a year to three times a year. Because we utilized event space in the Capitol Visitor Center for this program, we were ultimately able to increase the number of participants threefold at no additional cost.

Similarly, we were able to cut the costs of event space for the Stennis Fellows Program by moving our roundtables to the Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital, which is considerably cheaper than other D.C. options. The cost savings allowed us to expand the number of roundtables from four to six.

The second strategy that the Stennis Center has employed to limit programmatic costs is that we have created a system where our programs can build upon themselves without adding cost to the Stennis Center.

What this means in practice is that once someone has gone through our programs, they are much more likely to volunteer their time to give back to us and to the institution of Congress.

While this is difficult to quantify into an actual dollar amount, it does mean that we can have expert panelists, speakers, and seasoned veterans to mentor young staff and even interns serving on the editorial board of Public Service Review, our journal.

Finally, I would like to close by briefly bragging about the Congressional Program.

Despite the level funding, interest in our program continues to increase. Over the course of the 118th Congress, we had 248 individual participants complete their respective programming.

Further, the number of applications to our program has increased significantly. As an example, the number of applicants for the 119th Stennis Fellows Program was 122. This is a 27 percent

increase from the number of applications in the 118th Congress, almost a 200 percent increase from the 10-year average.

We believe that these kinds of statistics show that congressional staff value our programs.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today about the Stennis Center's appropriation request. I look forward to any questions you may have.

[The information follows:]

Dr. Brian Pugh, Executive Director of the Stennis Center for Public Service

With nearly 18 years of government experience, Dr. Brian Pugh is the executive director of the Stennis Center for Public Service—a federal, legislative branch agency of government with offices in Starkville, MS and Washington, D.C. He previously served as deputy executive director and deputy state fiscal officer for the Mississippi Department of Finance & Administration, as director of finance for the Office of the Governor, and as a legislative budget analyst for the Legislative Budget Office. He worked for the Stennis Center as a student at Mississippi State University (MSU) before his career in state government.

He received a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in public policy and public administration from MSU and a Ph.D. in public policy and administration from Jackson State University, where he also taught for the College of Public Service. Dr. Pugh currently serves on the faculty for the Shackouls Honors College, at MSU, and was the recipient of the Outstanding Faculty Mentor Award in 2022 and the Faculty Teaching Award in 2024.

With an interest in public finance and budgeting, Dr. Pugh received a certificate in public financial management from the Center for State and Local Finance at Georgia State University. He is also a member of the Association for Budgeting & Financial Management and the American Society for Public Administration. In 2021, he was unanimously elected as a life member of the National Association of State Budget Officers.

Dr. Pugh is the author of the book, "Chaos and Compromise: The Evolution of the Mississippi Budgeting Process," published by the University Press of Mississippi in 2020. His book titled, "Who's Running the Show: The Historic Fiscal Battle between Mississippi Governors and the Legislature," is in progress. Dr. Pugh also conducts research on federal budgeting and the appropriations process.

Passionate about making housing affordable for all, in the poorest state in the nation, Dr. Pugh serves on the board for the Mississippi Home Corporation (MHC)—the state's housing finance agency. Dr. Pugh currently serves as MHC's Vice-Chairman. On the national level, Dr. Pugh is a member of the National Council of State Housing Agencies.



**Testimony of Dr. Brian Pugh, Executive Director
John C. Stennis Center for Public Service Training and Development**

Good morning Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Dr. Brian Pugh, Executive Director of the John C. Stennis Center for Public Service Training and Development ("Stennis Center"). I am honored to speak to you today about the Stennis Center's \$430,000 appropriations request that funds our Congressional Programs.

History and Mission

The Stennis Center was established in 1988 by Public Law 100-458¹ with the statutory mission to 1) promote public service to young people and to get them interested in a career in public service, 2) to provide training and professional development opportunities to state and local elected officials and their staff, and 3) to provide training and professional development opportunities to Congressional staff.² We are overseen by a Board of Trustees that are required by law to be appointed by House and Senate leadership.³

Our programs that meet the third prong of our mission – to provide training and development opportunities to Congressional staff – are known as our Congressional Programs. Because the Stennis Center's request is for expenses related to these programs, I will focus on discussing those.

Congressional Programs

The Stennis Center has multiple ways that it meets its mandate to provide training and development opportunities to Congressional staff. Our flagship program is the Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program ("Stennis Fellows Program"). Established during the 103rd Congress, the Stennis Fellows Program is a year-and-a-half-long program that focuses on the challenges to Congress as an institution of American democracy and the role that Congressional staff play in meeting those challenges.

¹ Codified at 2 U.S.C. §1101 - 10.

² 2 U.S.C. § 1104.

³ *Id.* at §1103(b).

The Stennis Fellows Program occurs every Congress and selects 30-34 bipartisan, bicameral senior Congressional staff members to engage in professional development designed to help them be better managers and leaders, as well as be more productive staff members. The program includes roundtable discussions of relevant topics such as polarization, managing across a generational divide, staff capacity, and separation of powers. We also host overnight stays at a university such as Princeton University as well as the National Conservation Training Center.

Once a Stennis Fellow completes the program we then “graduate” them to Senior Stennis Fellows. These Senior Fellows play a vital role in the rest of our Congressional programming and our ability to meet the other two prongs of our mission. Given that these Senior Fellows are current or former staff, they have expert levels of knowledge and understanding about key facets of Congress. They are committed to public service and the institution of Congress specifically, and they can play a wide range of roles in the rest of our programs. Senior Fellows can speak on topics such as the Appropriations process or managing a Congressional office. They can mentor young staff to help them grow as a Congressional staffer and stay longer on the Hill. They can explain the legislative process to interns who are interested in becoming full-time staff. And they can share their personal experiences to show that public service can come from all walks of life. There are currently over 400 Senior Stennis Fellows and in the 118th Congress we had almost 100 opportunities for them to volunteer their time to our programs.

Another of the Stennis Center’s Congressional Programs is the Emerging Congressional Staff Leaders Program (“Emerging Leaders Program”). This is a one-on-one mentoring program where we pair a junior or mid-level staffer with a Senior Stennis Fellow. Though this, too, is a bipartisan, bicameral program, the Stennis Center strives to match mentees with a mentor who shares similar political ideology, issue area expertise, and, when appropriate, the same chamber of Congress. In addition to one-on-one mentoring, this program provides participants with roughly four group sessions to discuss topics such as advancing a legislative agenda, parliamentary procedure with the House and Senate Parliamentarians, and other relevant topics. The Emerging Leaders Program runs in the second half of every Congressional session.

Our final Congressional Program is the Stennis Program for Congressional Interns (“Stennis Intern Program”). The Stennis Intern Program is a bipartisan, bicameral program that hosts roughly 30 students every spring, summer, and fall for five two-hour sessions on institutional aspects of Congress. These sessions are led by experts – typically Senior Stennis Fellows – about a specific topic and provide the interns with an opportunity to ask questions and network with these experts. We also provide them with a small group project where they are tasked with advising a fake Member of Congress and then are paired up with a Senior Stennis Fellow to discuss the finer points of being a legislative staffer.

In addition to these Congressional Programs, we have a quarterly journal called *Public Service Review*, which is dedicated to the publication and dissemination of young people’s

reflections and experiences in the public service sector through professional or volunteer opportunities. The purpose of the journal is to acknowledge and influence the important and substantive work carried out by young people in local, state, and federal government entities, universities and colleges, and nonprofit organizations across the United States. Participants selected for the Stennis Intern Program are required to write an article about their experience in *Public Service Review* and, in some cases, interns volunteer to serve on the journal's editorial board. Senior Fellows and Emerging Leaders may also provide content for *Public Service Review*.

FY 2026 Budget Summary

The Stennis Center for Public Service is requesting level funding, which is \$430,000. The Stennis Center strives to present the highest quality programs for congressional staff at the lowest possible cost. The Stennis Center has been operating on the same funding level for multiple years now. The appropriations request for FY 2026 is essential to enable the Stennis Center to continue to provide training and development opportunities to congressional staff as mandated by its authorizing legislation. Without the appropriation, the highly successful Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program, Emerging Congressional Staff Leaders Program, and Stennis Program for Congressional Interns would be severely reduced, if not eliminated.

Budget Request Details

Congressional Staff Programs (by Program Activity)

Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program	\$300,000
Emerging Congressional Staff Leaders Program	25,000
Stennis Leadership Program for Congressional Interns/Students	60,000
Civil-Military Leadership Program for Members and Staff	20,000
Senior Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program	<u>25,000</u>
Total	\$430,000

(by Object Classification)

Personnel	\$243,500
Direct Program Costs (including speakers, facilities, travel, food and lodging)	159,700
Office Lease and Utilities	20,500
Printing, Copying and Postage	1,300
Equipment and Supplies	<u>5,000</u>
Total	\$430,000

Cost Saving Measures and Increased Program Participation

As I noted, the Stennis Center is requesting level funding for fiscal year 2026. This is the same amount of funding that we have requested in previous years. The Stennis Center has been able to keep level funding despite increased costs because of two main strategies.

The first strategy has been to consistently evaluate ways that we can save money without substantially impacting the quality of our programs. The money saved can then be used in other ways that improve our programs or – as has been the case in recent years – offset rising costs. One of my proudest cost saving measures has been our recent move to the Library of Congress. At the beginning of the 2025 fiscal year, the Stennis Center moved from a leased space in a private office building to the Adams building at the Library of Congress. If you factor in the savings from services such as utilities and parking, the total yearly savings is almost \$50,000, which is the equivalent of 11.5% of our budget request.

However, this is not the only benefit to moving to the Library. Because it is so much larger than the Stennis Center, the Library can potentially provide us with services that would otherwise cost us exponentially more if we were to contract out on an ad hoc basis. These conversations are currently on going, but we hope to have other examples of our fruitful relationship with the Library of Congress in the years to come.

While our move to the Library is the most noteworthy example of cost savings, I would like to provide a couple examples of how we have adjusted our programs to save costs while maintaining their high quality. One example is the cost of food and refreshments for the Stennis Intern Program. While I am a big believer in southern hospitality and always having food for your guests, we decided in 2022 to cut back on the food that we provided to the program.⁴ This allowed us to go from hosting the Stennis Intern Program once a year to three times a year. Because we utilize event space in the Capitol Visitor Center for this program, we were ultimately able to increase the number of participants threefold at no additional cost. Similarly, we were able to cut the cost of event space for the Stennis Fellows program by moving our roundtables to the Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital. The Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital is considerably cheaper than other options in D.C. because it is run by a nonprofit organization. These cost savings allowed us to expand the number of roundtables from four to six.

The second strategy that the Stennis Center has employed to limit programmatic costs is that we have created a system where our programs can build upon themselves without adding costs to the Stennis Center. What this means in practice is that once someone has gone through one of our programs, they are much more likely to volunteer their time to give back to us and the institution of Congress. While this is difficult to quantify into an actual dollar amount, it does mean that we can have expert panelist speakers, seasoned veterans

⁴ The Stennis Center is authorized pursuant to 2 U.S.C. §1108(a)(7) to make "expenditures for meals, entertainment and refreshments in connection with official training sessions or other authorized programs."

to mentor young staff, and even interns serving on the editorial board of our *Public Service Review* journal all on a volunteer basis.

Finally, I would like to close by briefly bragging about our Congressional Programs. Despite the level funding, interest in our programs continues to increase. Over the course of the 118th Congress, we had 248 individuals participate and complete their respective programming. Further, the number of applicants to our programs has increased significantly. As an example, the number of applicants for the 119th Stennis Fellows program was 122. This is a 27% increase from the number of applicants in the 118th Congress and almost a 200% increase from the ten-year average.⁵ We believe that these kinds of statistics show that congressional staff value our programs and we plan to continue to provide them at the highest quality possible.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today about the Stennis Center's appropriation request and our Congressional Programs. I look forward to any questions you may have.

⁵ This includes five application periods for the 114th Congress through the 118th Congress.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Pugh.

And I now recognize Mr. Crane for his 5 minutes for a summary of his testimony.

STATEMENT OF MR. MARTIN CRANE

Mr. CRANE. Good morning, Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and distinguished committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights to discuss our budget justification for fiscal year 2026.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the landmark Congressional Accountability Act, which the 104th Congress enacted with virtually unanimous support in 1995.

In so doing, Congress promised the American public that it would no longer exempt itself from the workplace safety, accessibility, and veterans' preference laws that it applies to the private sector and the executive branch.

To paraphrase a sponsor of the new law, enactment of the Congressional Accountability Act ended once and for all the era of "it applies to thee but not to me."

Since then, the CAA has served as a model of good government and accountability to the American taxpayer. Congress ensures that its promise of accountability is matched by action through our office, the independent, nonpartisan Office of Congressional Workplace Rights.

In carrying out our mission under the CAA we strive to serve as a steward for government efficiency. With only 34 FTEs, we are one of the smallest offices with a line item in the Federal budget.

Yet the broad range of nearly 20 antidiscrimination, safety, accessibility, and veterans' preference laws that we administer in the legislative branch is comparable in scope to that of multiple executive branch agencies, such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Federal Labor Relations Authority, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and multiple components of the Departments of Labor and Justice.

The OCWR has executed its mission on an operating budget that is a fraction of that of the smallest of these executive branch agencies. For fiscal year 2026, the OCWR requests funding of \$8.6 million, or 5 percent over the continuing resolution amount for fiscal year 2025.

Our request focuses on efficiency and considers only strictly mission-critical line items. It does not propose any new programs, but it would allow the OCWR to perform its continuing statutory mandate at the same levels as it has in past years.

This mandate is embodied in the Congressional Accountability Act itself.

As required by the CAA, we develop and provide outreach, education, and training to the congressional community on the laws applied through the CAA.

We provide confidential advising services for legislative branch employees on CAA rights and responsibilities.

We operate an administrative dispute resolution program, which includes administrative hearings and voluntary mediation.

Our Office of General Counsel enforces laws governing safety, accessibility, labor relations, and it also inspects more than 18 million square feet of facilities and grounds in the legislative branch to ensure that they are and remain safe and accessible.

Our board of directors reports to each Congress with recommendations on maintaining parity between the laws that apply to the private sector and the executive branch and those that apply to the legislative branch.

We also administer a biennial survey to more than 30,000 legislative branch employees which assesses the congressional workplace environment and the effectiveness of reforms.

More than 80 percent of our budget request is for personnel costs associated with 34 authorized FTEs, including projected COLA adjustments.

We depend on our ability to recruit and retain highly skilled personnel, such as safety inspectors and IT records and legal professionals.

Our budget request for fiscal year 2026 will allow us to maintain competitive compensation levels.

Although we are projecting an increase in personnel costs, our enhanced ability to perform more services in-house that were previously provided by outside contractors and service providers has resulted in a significant decrease in non-personnel costs. We expect this trend to continue.

Our fiscal year 2026 budget request will allow the OCWR to succeed while serving as a responsible and efficient steward of taxpayers' money.

I therefore ask that you support it and our continued work in executing our crucial mission under the Congressional Accountability Act in the coming fiscal year.

Again, thank you for your ongoing and steadfast support.

[The information follows:]

**Martin J. Crane**

Martin J. Crane was appointed in January 2024 as the Executive Director of the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights (OCWR), which was established by Congress to administer the Congressional Accountability Act in the legislative branch. Before his appointment, Mr. Crane had served as an OCWR Deputy Executive Director since 2017.

Prior to joining the OCWR, Mr. Crane served as Chief Counsel to the Chairman of the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board. Additionally, he spent over 15 years practicing labor and employment law in the private sector. Mr. Crane earned his law degree from the George Washington University Law School and his undergraduate degree from Eastern Michigan University.

**Statement of
Martin J. Crane
Executive Director
Office of Congressional Workplace Rights**

**Before the
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives**

**at a Hearing Entitled
“Budget Hearing – John C. Stennis Center for Public Service, Office of Congressional
Workplace Rights, and Congressional Office for International Leadership”**

**Presented
April 29, 2025**

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Legislative Branch Subcommittee, thank you for providing me the opportunity to submit this statement regarding the budget request of the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights (OCWR) for Fiscal Year 2026. We thank the Subcommittee for its steadfast support as we carry out our statutory mandate to administer the Congressional Accountability Act (CAA) in the legislative branch.

For FY26, the OCWR requests funding of \$8,593,902.

The Landmark Congressional Accountability Act

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the CAA, which was enacted with virtually unanimous support as one of the first orders of the 104th Congress. In doing so, Congress promised the American public that it would no longer exempt itself from the workplace, safety, and accessibility laws that it applied to the private sector and the executive branch. Since then, the CAA has served as a model of accountability, through which Congress has applied those laws to itself. They presently include:

- *Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, which guarantees a workplace free from discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, and religion;
- *The Age Discrimination in Employment Act*, which prohibits age discrimination;
- *The Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act*, which prohibit disability discrimination;
- *The Family and Medical Leave Act/Federal Employee Paid Leave Act*, which provide protections and benefits, including paid parental leave, for employees needing leave for specified family and medical reasons;
- *The Fair Labor Standards Act*, which requires minimum wage and overtime pay for nonexempt employees, restricts child labor, and prohibits sex-based wage differentials;

- *The Employee Polygraph Protection Act*, which restricts the use and the results of polygraph testing;
- *The Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act*, which requires that employees be notified of office closings or mass layoffs;
- *The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act*, which protects past or present members of the uniformed services from discrimination or retaliation and provides certain benefits and reemployment rights;
- *The Veterans Employment Opportunities Act*, which enhances access for eligible veterans to job opportunities and establishes a redress system if their veterans' preference rights are violated;
- *The Occupational Safety and Health Act*, which requires employing offices to comply with occupational safety and health standards and to provide workplaces free of recognized hazards;
- *The Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute*, which allows certain legislative branch employees the right to form, join, or assist a labor organization or to refrain from such activity;
- *The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act*, which prohibits the use of genetic information as a basis for taking a personnel action;
- *The Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act*, which prohibits employing offices from asking most job applicants about their criminal history prior to extending conditional offers of employment;
- *The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act*, which requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations for an employee's known limitations related to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions; and
- *The anti-retaliation provisions of the CAA*, which prohibit intimidation, reprisal, or discrimination against employees who exercise their rights under the CAA.

More recently, the 115th Congress unanimously passed the CAA Reform Act in 2018, thereby renewing its pledge and reaffirming its unwavering commitment to the principles embodied in the CAA.

The OCWR's Role and Operations

Congress established the OCWR as the independent office of the House and the Senate that implements the CAA in the legislative branch. Although the OCWR is a small office, its mandate is broad, and its work is essential for Congress to ensure that its promise of accountability is matched by action.

The OCWR strives to serve as a steward for government efficiency. With just 34 authorized FTEs, the OCWR performs many of the functions performed by several executive branch agencies, such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Federal Labor Relations Authority, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and other components of the Departments of Labor and Justice.

The OCWR has fulfilled its ongoing mandate over the years on an operating budget that is a fraction of that of the smallest of these agencies.

The OCWR has one program—to administer the CAA. To achieve our mandate, the OCWR operates several distinct but complimentary subprograms. As required by the CAA:

- We develop and provide outreach, education, and training to the congressional community, which fosters hazard-free and accessible workplaces free from unlawful employment practices. In FY25 the OCWR significantly updated its CAA training videos, each focusing on specific employment rights and procedures under the CAA. In FY24 and into FY25, the OCWR also launched its in-house Learning Management System (LMS) on ocwr.gov as part of our continuing commitment to provide outstanding and up-to-date education modules and training options for the legislative branch community. Managing the LMS internally offers several advantages, including substantial cost savings, the flexibility to instantaneously implement legal updates as needed, and the ability to create and upload new training modules continuously.
- Our Board of Directors submits to each Congress a report of recommended actions to ensure that the protections and responsibilities applied through the CAA are equivalent to those applicable to the private sector and the executive branch. In FY25, the Board submitted its recommendations for consideration by the incoming 119th Congress, which are also available on ocwr.gov.
- Our OCWR Office of General Counsel (OGC) investigates alleged violations of laws governing hazard-free workplaces, accessibility, and labor relations; works with stakeholders to resolve alleged violations; and prosecutes violations of such laws. Each Congress, OGC also inspects more than 18 million square feet of facilities and grounds in the legislative branch to ensure that they are and remain hazard-free and accessible. In FY24 and FY25, OGC continued to assist legislative branch employing offices by developing and hosting nine presentations involving key issues and developments under the laws applied by the CAA. In FY25, OGC also worked with the USCP to increase awareness among constituents and visitors regarding the security screening procedures for Capitol Hill facilities, including procedures for individuals with disabilities.
- The OCWR administers the statutorily required biennial Congressional Workplace Climate Survey to more than 30,000 legislative branch employees, which assesses the workplace environment, including attitudes regarding sexual harassment. The survey for the 118th Congress closed in FY24, and preparations have commenced for the next survey, which will be conducted in FY26.
- We provide privileged and confidential advice to covered employees about their rights and responsibilities under the CAA. In FY24, employee requests for confidential advice and information reached an all-time high since the enactment of the CAA Reform Act.
- We operate an Administrative Dispute Resolution (ADR) program, which includes voluntary mediation and administrative hearings, to resolve claims alleging violations of the laws incorporated by the CAA. In FY25, the office continues to process claims in an efficient and timely manner, meeting all statutory deadlines, and operating without a backlog.

The OCWR's FY 2026 Budget Request

The OCWR's zero-based budget request for FY26 focuses on its statutory mandates and on improving the delivery of services to legislative branch stakeholders. It does not embody any significant new program areas or large-scale initiatives.

Personnel Costs

The OCWR depends heavily on its FTEs to accomplish its varied mission. As a result, the majority of the OCWR's annual budget is for personnel costs, including pay and benefits, for OCWR staff. More than 80 percent of the OCWR's FY26 budget request is for projected costs associated with 34 authorized full-time FTEs, which includes the five part-time Board members, who serve on a "when-actually-employed" basis and together comprise one of the FTEs. Our request incorporates a 3.8% across-the-board pay increase based on Congressional Budget Office projections.

Non-personnel Costs

The remaining approximately 17% of the OCWR's budget request is for non-personnel costs. These costs include pay for contract services, equipment, and supplies needed to operate the OCWR. They also cover costs associated with our interagency agreements for services provided to the OCWR by partner federal agencies, including the Library of Congress and the National Finance Center. The OCWR's non-personnel costs have significantly decreased since FY24, and we expect this trend to continue in FY26. Therefore, the OCWR requests approximately \$1.5 million for non-personnel costs. I highlight some of the especially significant non-personnel costs below:

Education and Training

As stated above, among the OCWR's significant responsibilities is its statutory mandate to provide a program to educate Members of Congress and legislative branch staff on their rights and responsibilities under the CAA. OCWR trainers deliver remote and in-person training sessions tailored to meet the unique needs of legislative branch stakeholders. Demand for OCWR training and outreach services continues to increase, and the OCWR has continued to enhance its training program, delivering new and informative modules via web-conferencing, in-person sessions, and on-line videos.

The OCWR requests \$45,000 for non-personnel services for FY26 to facilitate OCWR staff in support of this program.

Administrative Dispute Resolution

The OCWR requests \$400,000 for non-personnel services for FY26 for the administration of its ADR processes. This amount includes funding to pay the contract rates for our hearing officers and mediators. It also includes funding for technical services and necessary updates to support the operation of the ADR e-filing system.* With respect to the ADR non-personnel cost projection, we note that it is impossible to predict with certainty the number of cases claimants will file with the OCWR's ADR program each year. Considering that, we based the ADR non-personnel estimate upon average actual expenditures from FY21 through FY24. Although we believe that relying on FY21 through FY24 as guides for FY26 is reasonable, there is some risk that the number of cases could climb, or fall, from the caseload that sustained the FY21 through FY24 costs.

* The requested amount does not include non-personnel costs associated with the Board of Directors' function as the reviewing body for claims that are appealed from OCWR hearing officers under the ADR program.

General Information Technology/Communications/Web Services

IT modernization and security continues to be a key focus for the OCWR. The OCWR administers a local area network and the hardware and software required to support the network. The OCWR requests approximately \$793,000 for non-personnel services for FY26 for information technology equipment and operations. These non-personnel costs cover the necessary equipment, contractor, and interagency agreement costs to facilitate these efforts, which are in addition to the costs specifically for contractor support of the ADR e-filing system.

Inspecting Legislative Branch Facilities

As stated above, the OGC is responsible for inspecting all facilities in the legislative branch for occupational safety and health violations at least once each Congress. The OGC is also responsible for inspecting the public areas of all facilities in the legislative branch for compliance with titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The OCWR has been able to hire experienced safety professionals as FTEs who perform inspections and investigations previously performed by contractors and service providers. As such, the non-personnel allocation for inspections for FY26 includes \$50,000.

Conclusion

The OCWR is committed to executing our crucial mission in the coming fiscal year. I believe this budget request will allow the OCWR to succeed while remaining efficient and serving as a responsible steward of taxpayer's money. As such, I respectfully ask for your support of this request. I look forward to providing this Subcommittee with any additional information it may require at this hearing and the coming days as part of the appropriations process.

Thank you.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Crane.

And I now recognize Ms. Sargus for her 5-minute summary of her testimony.

STATEMENT OF MS. JANE SARGUS

Ms. SARGUS. Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Congressional Office for International Leadership, or COIL for short.

For 25 years, COIL has been offering a proven platform for congressional diplomacy, linking future foreign leaders with you and the communities that you represent. It is a legislative branch tool created by this body to advance American leadership in a uniquely nonpartisan way.

I am honored to be speaking directly to you today to report that COIL and its Open World Program does, in fact, promote national security, strategic congressional diplomacy, and nonpartisan values.

We respectfully request a \$1.2 million increase to our appropriation for fiscal year 2026, bringing our total to \$7.2 million.

We have operated at or below \$6 million for the last 12 budget cycles, despite a decade of expanded programming and rising costs.

Cost-sharing efforts with local host organizations have reached their maximum. Yet, meanwhile, demand from local American hosts themselves continues to exceed our capacity, as we had to turn away nearly 40 percent of eligible communities this year due to budgetary constraints.

So today I am not just asking for a 20 percent increase in our budget. I am asking you to invest in a program that delivers high-value, low-cost, and real results for Congress and for America.

What would the 20 percent accomplish? We could strengthen our parliamentary exchanges for one thing, and we could deepen engagement in underrepresented American communities for another.

By bringing global leadership into direct contact with over 2,000 American communities, you are supporting local economies while creating international understanding through home stay and grass-roots engagement.

The program impacts American communities when delegates travel to our cities, staying with host families, engaging with local institutions, and exchanging professional expertise.

For every dollar invested, we return value in the form of good will, local engagement, and strategic influence. Our operating model uses local hosts, volunteers, and existing civic institutions, making us lean, effective, and bipartisan.

But growth has reached the limits of what is possible at our current funding level. We operate a lean and highly effective agency that leverages partnerships with organizations so that we can minimize overhead and maximize reach.

Cost pressures continue to rise. Since 2019, cost-of-living adjustments for salaries are nearing 20 percent, benefit rates have risen by more than 7 percent, and per delegate costs alone have doubled.

Grants needed to execute a high-level program now include higher costs for van rentals, drivers, gas, food, and contracted labor.

Airfare alone from the Indo-Pacific can be up to 30 percent higher than from Europe.

By working in new strategic regions, though, we also lose the economies of scale that once made it possible to stretch \$6 million across a limited number of countries.

Every budget request before you is framed as essential. I understand that. But let me tell you why this increase is not just warranted, it is smart, it is timely, and directly aligned with the strategic goals of this Congress. It is a cost-effective, locally rooted, fiscally conservative, and internationally impactful program that many in Congress are also very proud of.

At home, civic clubs, universities, and local governments across the country host Open World delegations because they believe in a mission that supports Congress. Nearly all of our funding is spent domestically, reinvested in local economies in every State.

Do you want to promote American values abroad? We have been doing that for 25 years quietly, effectively, and with the help of ordinary Americans in every State. With your continued support, we will keep bringing leaders who believe in democracy because they have seen it right here and often for the first time in your offices.

In closing, our mission is simple but powerful: to connect you with the world one leader at a time. Members of this subcommittee, COIL the agency is an asset, it is a resource, and it is an investment. The Open World Program is your program. It was created by you, for you, and our team is small, our mission is focused, and our results are measurable.

We respectfully request your support for this \$1.2 million increase so that we can meet rising demand, support congressional priorities, and sustain America's voice in the world from one country to one community at a time.

Thank you for your time and for your continued support of congressional diplomacy. I look forward to your questions. And I would like to say thank you to my staff who are with me today for their extraordinary support and outstanding service to Congress.

Thank you.

[The information follows:]

Jane Sargus

Executive Director, Congressional Office for International Leadership



Jane Sargus, of Washington, D.C. is the Executive Director of the Congressional Office for International Leadership (formerly known as the Open World Leadership Center). Before assuming her duties as Executive Director, Ms. Sargus brings 40 years of federal experience to the Open World program.

Having served as Open World's Program Administrator and Budget Officer from 2008 to 2012, Ms. Sargus crafted the congressional budget justification for the Appropriations Committee in the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate. With her financial management experience and a deep understanding of international programs in the Legislative Branch, Ms. Sargus performed in-depth analysis and research on multiple and complex issues related to budget formulation for a program with both national and international impact. From 2012 to 2017, Ms. Sargus rose to serve as Open World's Deputy Executive Director to manage day-to-day operations for all aspects of the agency and to coordinate its logistical contract of \$7 million annually.

Prior to Open World, Ms. Sargus served in the Library's Congressional Research Service (CRS) where she provided critical fiscal support for the Frost Special Task Force on the Development of Parliamentary Institutions in Eastern and Central Europe while also serving on the Financial Management Team overseeing CRS's annual appropriation. Later, as a Budget Analyst in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer of the Library of Congress, her work supported the Library's \$400 million budget request for congressional oversight committees. Ms. Sargus spent five years in the Library's John W. Kluge Center managing all aspects of financial operations for more than 20 funds totaling over \$71 million.

Jane Sargus has a B.A. from the Miami University in Oxford, OH and graduate work in Business Administration from The George Washington University.

Testimony of Jane Sargus
Executive Director, Congressional Office for International Leadership
For the Subcommittees on the Legislative Branch
Committees on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
April 29, 2025

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat and Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record on behalf of the Congressional Office for International Leadership (COIL or the Office). Congressional participation on our governing board and in our programming has made COIL uniquely positioned to support Members in conducting Congressional Diplomacy and in serving their constituents across the country. We are deeply grateful for your support and commitment to this agency.

The Office administers the Open World Program (OWP) – a legislative branch Congressional Diplomacy tool that has brought international leaders to the United States since 1999. At its inception, the program focused on bringing rising leaders from a handful of post-Soviet countries to the United States, building mutual understanding and informal networks between our nations. Since then, at the direction of Congress, COIL has expanded the OWP portfolio to include 29 countries throughout Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific, bringing hundreds of delegates annually to meet their professional counterparts in Congress and across the United States.

Serving Member Interests

COIL's mission is centered on serving Congress, and we support the legislative branch through the OWP in alignment with Member interests and priorities. What began as a single-country initiative in 1999 has grown, entirely through congressional request, into a network of 29 active country programs.

Our programming is responsive by design. We introduce new themes to reflect emerging global challenges and areas of strategic interest to the United States. For example, in response to the evolving needs of Congress and our partners in-region, we've added new sub-themes within our Ukraine program, such as critical mineral development, post-conflict reconstruction, and energy security. Rising tensions with the People's Republic of China and related trade and security issues have led to the development of a robust Indo-Pacific parliamentary program, which in 2025 includes six key regional partners. These efforts are designed to deliver candid, firsthand perspectives to Congress that inform policymaking in real time. COIL, and more specifically the OWP, exists as a tool for Congress: one that delivers poignant, unfiltered information directly to decision-makers on Capitol Hill.

COIL's Future

In a continually shifting geopolitical and socioeconomic landscape, COIL will continue to bring relevant, impactful delegations to brief Congress and to build relationships with ordinary Americans. With a fully funded budget in FY2026, we plan to expand our Indo-Pacific

programming, emphasizing legislative relationship building and trade and security issues. The agency will also devote additional staff support to forming the critical partnerships and projects that become the legacy of the OWP. Increasing the number of regional delegations is also a priority, as bringing multinational delegations together on issues gives programs a novel, holistic element to the common challenges those countries may face.

Understanding the stewardship and responsibility that comes along with public funds, COIL has exercised cautious judgment about requesting an increase. FY2025 is the thirteenth consecutive fiscal year that the agency has operated with an appropriation at or below \$6 million. Despite cost-saving measures, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain optimal operations while enhancing the OWP. We respectfully request an increase of \$1.2 million in FY2026.

Benefit to American Communities

Community demand for the OWP is so great that the agency could only accommodate 63% of proposals in 2025. Local organizations like Rotary clubs, world affairs councils, and community colleges host programming year after year, and provide perhaps the most unique element of the Open World model: the home stay. By placing each participant in an American family home for the duration of their stay, our participants and their American hosts achieve an indelible and positive imprint on each other that lasts for the rest of their lives.

COIL has worked with local partners through the OWP to host delegates in over 3,000 communities in every state across America. After COIL awards local host organizations with grants, local partners work tirelessly to create robust programming for OWP delegations. These programs achieve two objectives: 1.) They enrich the local community by stimulating conversation and education about important domestic and international topics, and 2.) They showcase U.S. state and community eclecticism to international partners and stakeholders.

Host communities across the United States participate in order to build relationships with interesting delegates, and receive a modest but important revenue stream. As a program that is proudly American, at least 90% of appropriated funds are spent in the United States. As a result, nearly all of COIL's appropriation is reinvested back into American communities, rural and urban alike.

This unique structure – combining professional programming with cultural immersion – has proven to be a powerful, cost-effective, and sustainable approach to Congressional Diplomacy. Over time, it has fostered a network of professional and personal relationships that deliver lasting benefits at home and abroad.

Rising Operating Costs and Fiscal Responsibility

COIL's modest funding level has allowed us to deliver an outsized impact for Congress and American communities. However, current funding levels do not sufficiently empower COIL to meet the needs of Congress and constituents.

Since 2019, the cost-of-living adjustment for salaries has approached nearly 20%, while benefit rates have increased by at least 10%. In addition, the cost of our annual audit – a mandatory

requirement – has more than doubled, now exceeding \$94,000. COIL has absorbed these increases through internal efficiencies, including staffing reductions and streamlining administrative operations.

The cost per delegate has also nearly doubled since 2019 due to factors outside the agency’s control. These include rising grant line-item costs, such as van rentals, fuel, food, and driver support, as well as escalating logistical and travel contract expenses. Additionally, airfare for delegates from the Indo-Pacific is often 30% higher than travel from other regions we work in. Despite these pressures, COIL continues to deliver high-impact programming because of strong partnerships with local host organizations.

However, cost-sharing has reached its ceiling. Local hosts now contribute at maximum sustainable levels, often supplementing Open World programing with in-kind donations, volunteer labor, and financial support. Without an increase in our appropriation, COIL risks being forced to reduce the number of delegates we bring, reduce the number of countries we partner with, or eliminate themes aligned with evolving congressional interests.

With nearly all of our appropriation reinvested directly into U.S. communities, COIL continues to represent one of the most cost-effective tools available to Congress for cultivating global relationships, supporting American civil society, and advancing U.S. interests. The requested \$1.2 million increase would empower COIL to meet rising programmatic costs, enhance OWP initiatives through new and responsive themes, and maintain the scale and caliber of programming that Members of Congress have come to rely on.

Update: Indo-Pacific

COIL continues to rapidly expand Indo-Pacific programming in response to regional interest and congressional support. Since launching in 2022, the program has grown from three to eight participating countries. In 2025, COIL will host 78 delegates from Vietnam, Indonesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Mongolia, including 54 Members of Parliament.

The program’s continued expansion reflects both the strategic importance of the region and COIL’s ability to foster high-impact engagement where traditional diplomatic tools face challenges. In Vietnam, COIL has facilitated robust exchanges with 12 Members of the National Assembly, with an additional 12 set to participate in 2025. Our ability to build strong relationships with the National Assembly has been recognized by U.S. executive branch partners as a valuable complement to ongoing diplomatic efforts. In 2025, COIL will welcome inaugural delegations of Members of Parliament from the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, and Vanuatu, further deepening our presence in the Pacific Islands. These delegations represent a significant milestone for the program, particularly in light of geopolitical competition in the region.

The Indo-Pacific initiative originated at the bipartisan request of Congressman Don Bacon (R-NE) and Congressman Ed Case (D-HI) and was launched in close consultation with U.S. Embassies in the region. From the outset, the program has been guided by two objectives: to

assess regional parliamentary interest in engagement with Congress and to enable sustained, peer-to-peer legislative dialogue across the region.

As COIL enters its fourth year of programming in the Indo-Pacific, we remain committed to building trust and ensuring that Members of Congress have access to unfiltered insights from one of the world's most dynamic regions.

Update: Ukraine

Since Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, COIL has hosted over 400 Ukrainian leaders, with that number expected to surpass 600 by the end of 2025. Delegates have included Members of Parliament, civil society leaders, polytrauma specialists, and frontline responders. Each delegation possesses a key role in informing Members of Congress, in supporting anti-corruption reforms, and in preparing Ukraine for post-war reconstruction.

COIL's partnerships with Ukraine's legislature, government ministries, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs have produced lasting, tangible outcomes. In 2024, one such initiative brought together Ukrainian and American veterans' affairs professionals to exchange best practices for supporting injured service members and reintegrating veterans into civilian life. Ukrainian delegates visited polytrauma centers across the United States, sharing firsthand accounts of battlefield medicine and learning from U.S. systems of long-term care. As a result, U.S. institutions and professionals learn about the effects of modern warfare on military and battlefield stakeholders, providing lessons-learned for the betterment of the United States. These exchanges have continued to lay robust groundwork for growing partnerships between the Ukrainian Ministry of Veterans Affairs and U.S. government institutions.

COIL's parliamentary programming remains central to the U.S.-Ukraine relationship, providing Members of Congress the opportunity to engage directly with Ukrainian lawmakers, including members of the Special Forces and Verkhovna Rada committee chairs on national security, energy, and budget. These engagements offer insights on topics ranging from aid accountability to battlefield developments and wartime governance. Notably, over 10% of the current Verkhovna Rada has participated in COIL programs, with alumni serving in ministerial roles and on nearly every parliamentary committee.

As COIL prepares to host 12 Members of Parliament and hundreds of civil society leaders in 2025, our Ukraine programming continues to be a cornerstone of congressional engagement on the war.

Update: Belarus

In 2024, COIL resumed engagement with the people of Belarus through the OWP, following a multi-year pause prompted by the Lukashenko regime's support for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Working in partnership with the U.S.-recognized Belarusian Coordination Council, Belarus' democratically elected government in exile, and the U.S. Embassy in Vilnius, COIL launched a new initiative to support actors resisting authoritarian rule.

COIL's 2025 Belarusian programming focuses on governance and strengthening its relationship with the Coordination Council. These delegations create vital space for dialogue between Congress and Belarus' U.S.-recognized government-in-exile.

Update: Regional Delegations

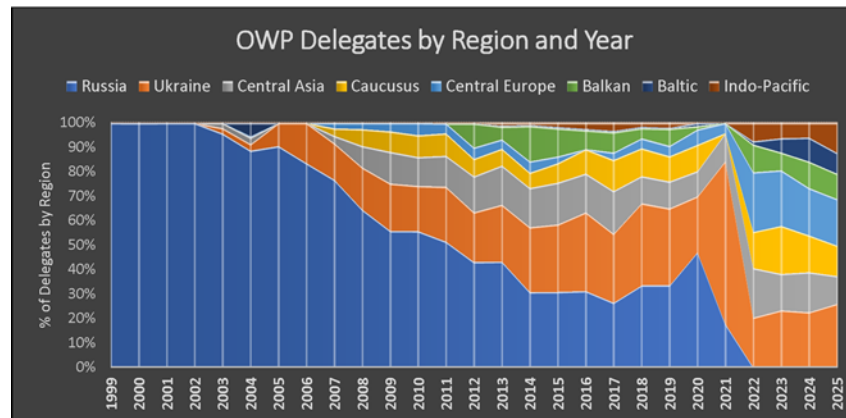
Launched in 2023, COIL's regional delegation model continues to deliver cost savings and foster collaborative problem-solving by bringing together stakeholders from multiple countries within a single region. What began with participants from Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia has since expanded to include leaders from Central Asia, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe. In 2024, COIL welcomed its first Central Asian regional delegation, bringing together participants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

In 2025, COIL will build on this momentum by hosting regional delegations from the Balkans and Central Asia, along with a new Romanian-Moldovan joint delegation. These three programs will bring 33 professionals from 10 countries to the United States, more than doubling the size of COIL's regional programming since its inception just two years ago.

Regional delegations expose participants to American democracy alongside peers from neighboring countries, many of whom share complicated histories. This approach creates a unique space for collaboration, helping delegates associate Congress not only with American values, but also with the possibilities of regional cooperation.

COIL is also working to replicate this success in the Indo-Pacific by piloting regional programming for Pacific Island nations in 2025. This effort, being pursued in collaboration with Johns Hopkins University, if finalized, will provide Congress with new opportunities to engage rising leaders from one of the most important regions in the world.

OWP Delegate Breakdown by Country



Note: OWP in-person availability was impacted by 2021 travel restrictions, hence the lower number of delegates and countries.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Ms. Sargus.

Thank you to our witnesses for testifying before the committee today.

For questions, I will call on members based on the seniority of those present when the hearing was called to order, alternating between the majority and minority, then we will call on members in order of their arrival. Each will have 5 minutes.

And I now recognize myself for those 5 minutes.

Dr. Pugh, I want to begin by commending you for your fiscal responsibility and for the creative ways you have been increasing services with such a modest appropriation.

Can you share with the committee the impact you feel that this increase in programming will have on the legislative branch?

Mr. PUGH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think that our impact continues to be really important and touch a lot of Members, especially the ones that have staff that participate in our programs. It is not just the Stennis Fellows Program, which is our flagship program, which is for the senior-level staff, but we also continue to touch junior-level staff as well through our Emerging Leaders Program and our Stennis Program for Congressional Interns.

Yes, like my colleagues mentioned here, costs have gone up significantly, but we have just continued to save without touching the quality of the programs. We have done that in a lot of unique ways. Again, one of the biggest moves to the—I mean, the move we made was to the Library of Congress. So that has really helped us quite a bit.

And we do have a lot of senior Stennis fellows who go through the program that, once they complete the program, they help us with the additional programs. So that has been a large savings for us because staff cost is really expensive. But I am fortunate enough to be able to keep a small staff because I do depend heavily on the senior Stennis fellows that went through the program. So that is the primary cost-saver for us.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you.

Ms. Sargus, last year, when you testified before the subcommittee and in several meetings since, we have discussed a greater need for transparency and oversight within your agency to ensure your program reflects the will of Congress.

What changes has your agency implemented over the past year to ensure the appropriate oversight committees are aware of the work you are doing and to ensure that your programs are non-partisan in nature?

Ms. SARGUS. Thank you for that question.

To begin with, we are having quarterly meetings with one of the committees that was very interested in the work that we do, the Committee on House Administration. We also have regular review periods with the clerks. We keep people apprised of what is going on with our agency.

We are taking a fine-tooth comb to the character of our programs, but actually we are ordering them at a top-down level where it is more inclusive of Congress and the congressional interests of this particular Congress.

We are very mindful of that. We don't find it such a challenge because, generally, COIL's programs have served well over time. And we keep in mind that there are certain things that are more important than others, and we try to accomplish that and accommodate that whenever we can.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you.

Mr. Crane, in your testimony you briefly mentioned your responsibilities regarding training and education to the congressional community.

Can you share with us a little more about the types of training you offer and the increase in demand that you are seeing?

Mr. CRANE. Certainly.

We have a very extensive training, education, and outreach program. Training and education is really at the heart of what we do because we believe that an educated and trained workforce is far less likely to be one where they are troubled by unlawful discrimination or other unlawful employment practices.

The CAA requires that we maintain this program of training and education. It is available nationwide, which is consistent with the mandate in the statute that we offer services to the district offices that are comparable to those available to legislative branch employees on Capitol Hill.

Our program includes educational videos, video tutorials, in-person training, newsletters, fast facts on occupational safety and health matters, downloadable brochures.

Our Office of General Counsel conducts brown bags to assist legal practitioners who have cases before our office.

We offer training on public access and offer assistance in that department.

We also conduct labor management forums for practitioners in that area and OSH presentations, most recently a safety matters talk on internal workplace safety assessments.

Mr. VALADAO. All right. Well, thank you.

My time has expired. I now recognize Ranking Member Espallat for his questions for 5 minutes.

Mr. ESPALLAT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Crane, can you give us an update on the Workplace Rights Center, what you have done to modernize and increase the efficiency of services offered by your office, particularly given the environment of cuts? What have you done to improve the efficiency of services?

Mr. CRANE. Certainly.

We have added several systems that increase our efficiency not just on the Hill but in accordance with the CAA's mandate that we provide the same levels of service nationwide.

As mandated by the Reform Act, we now have a secure online platform for filing claims to adjudicate under the Congressional Accountability Act.

We now have a secure video conferencing system so that we can conduct virtual hearings in our ADR process, and we are finding that, in the majority of cases, practitioners and claimants prefer virtual hearings to in-person hearings, but both options are available.

Our training and education modules can be delivered virtually or in person. And we have also added the capacity to conduct secret ballot union representation elections virtually. So that provides employees the ability to vote regardless of their location.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Thank you.

Dr. Pugh, besides moving to the Library of Congress, how have significant Federal workforce cuts impacted your organization's ability to connect with young people and the fellowships? I mean, is there a bottom line? Have you decreased the fellowships? Have they increased? Are they the same? What is the status of the service that—the number of young people that you are servicing?

Mr. PUGH. So the young people it has not really affected because the Congressional Interns Program is the only one that will really deal specifically with young people, and we continue to recruit the same amount of students.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. What about the fellowships?

Mr. PUGH. So with the fellowships it is still—we don't select a fellows class every year. It is every new Congress. But it is still between 30 and 34. So we have continued the same number.

That obviously contributes to the cost savings too, though, because that number has not increased. It has been that way for a number of years now. But, I mean, again, if Congress would like that number to ever increase too, though, obviously more funding would be required for that.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Okay. With COIL, right, I know that you are asking for a 20 percent increase. How have the cuts across the board in government in general impacted COIL's mission and goals and objectives?

Ms. SARGUS. Well, we haven't seen any immediate outcomes from that, but I expect that grantees around the country are going to get concerned that they are not going to be able to apply for grants if we don't have the capacity to provide them with one. And giving grants is the primary purpose of the agency, which is to support civil society, rule of law, accountable governance, and transparency.

So, so far COIL has managed to stay in close contact with the large number of grantees that we work with, the small clubs around the country, and they keep us apprised of situations that require more attention from us, and we do our best to answer their concerns about that.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Mr. Chairman, these are relatively, like, three smaller agencies, and I think that they have a pretty good hands-on approach to how they administer them. But I think that overall, as these cuts begin to take place and hit the ground, it is particularly the small agencies that could be hit the hardest and devastated by the cuts because you have less to work with.

And so I encourage us to continue to be watchful of your operations and to ensure that they continue to move forward and that they get the proper funding, including the increases that are almost mandated every year because of the cost of living. We know how everything has increased dramatically.

But thank you for the work that you do.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Espailat.

Now I recognize Ms. Maloy for her 5 minutes.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate all of you being here to testify. I really appreciate what each of you said about how careful you are being with your budgets and stretching them, making them go farther.

Dr. Pugh, my staff tells me you have a tactical advantage in that one of the women sitting up here is a fellow, and I don't remember April doing a fellowship, so I think it must be Lori Rowley.

Which makes me want to ask you this question. Do you have, can you tell us a success story of one of your fellows who has come through your program and then helps us do a better job? You can exempt Lori since she is up here and it will embarrass her. Anybody else who has been successful? Since you are a small agency, and I think a lot of people are unaware of what you do.

Mr. PUGH. Okay. One success story that comes to mind is with the 118th Stennis fellows class. We had one Democrat and one Republican working together—because that is one of the things that the program does—and they worked together to work with their bosses to introduce legislation that was actually passed. That is one of the highlights of the program, and that doesn't happen that often, but it is remarkable when it does.

But for the members that are not as familiar with the program, by law, everything we do, it has to be bipartisan. We have Democrats and Republicans, we have House and Senate members, members from personal office and committee staff. So whenever we take them out, say, to a university or something and they are engaging with students and all, too, though, they really see Congress at its best because you guys know that you have amazing employees. And the staffers on the Hill, they are just truly amazing, they do remarkable work.

But that is the best story to me. And sometimes the students can't even tell based on the questions, how they respond to the question, who is in what party, and I think that just speaks to the quality of staff that is attracted to the Stennis Fellows Program.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you.

So just to be clear, the legislation they passed did make people's lives better?

Mr. PUGH. Most definitely.

Ms. MALOY. Okay. Thanks.

Also, as a former staffer, I always appreciate it when people brag on the staff. So thank you for that.

I have other questions, but I like the way that turned out.

Mr. Crane, I am going to give you the same chance. Can you tell us anything that—a success story that you have that makes what we do easier or makes life better for people on the Hill?

Mr. CRANE. Certainly.

We have had successes in virtually every subprogram that we operate on a day-to-day basis. Our training and education, we have significantly updated our CAA training videos, which are available on our website and which explain in plain English what employee rights are under those various laws.

We have launched an in-house learning management system that allows us to produce additional training and education materials that are tailored to the needs of the legislative branch.

Our Office of General Counsel worked with other instrumentalities in the legislative branch on issues and presented practitioners nine different presentations concerning the laws under the CAA and also worked with the instrumentalities to raise awareness of accessibility barriers faced by individuals with disabilities, particularly during security screenings at the entrances to the buildings.

Our board of directors submitted a report for consideration by the 119th Congress concerning changes to the CAA that, if enacted, would further the CAA's goal of maintaining parity between the legislative branch and the executive branch and the private sector.

Many more, but those are the highlights. Thank you.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you.

Ms. Sargus, I appreciated what you said about being careful in making sure that you are nonpartisan in your mission. I have got 40-something seconds left. Do you want to share a success story that you have?

Ms. SARGUS. Thank you for the question. It is a great question.

COIL has had excellent experience with identifying who the future leaders are that would be of interest and very good for the program.

We began a program in Poland in the summer of 2022, and after a 2-year period those delegates—there were some 50-plus delegates, three of whom became members of parliament in their next election.

So the fact that we can identify such a very, very high-level cohort who has the ability to advance that quickly is a point that we are very proud of.

We also——

Ms. MALOY. Sorry. I am out of time.

Ms. SARGUS. Oh, sorry.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you. I don't want the chairman to think I am irresponsible with my time like I was last time, so I am going to yield back.

Ms. SARGUS. Okay.

Mr. VALADAO. I appreciate that, Ms. Maloy.

Now I recognize Mr. Moore for his 5 minutes.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate you all being here.

Ms. Sargus, could I ask, so the makeup of this exchange program, what is the largest share of foreign nationals on that side that come over here? Is it a specific region of the world? What is that?

Ms. SARGUS. In the past couple of years it has been Ukraine, followed by Georgia.

Mr. MOORE. Is there a specific reason why it is Ukraine and Georgia?

Ms. SARGUS. No. However, a couple years ago we were instructed to enhance or build up our Ukraine program. It had been smaller. So the opportunity came up after 2022 when we suspended our Russia program indefinitely. So we were able to accommodate that enhancement. So that works well.

We also were able to partner with the VA, and it is probably a flagship program of ours that the VA works with veterans from Ukraine and provides programming for them in one of the five

polytrauma centers that the VA has in this country where our medical specialists are getting the opportunity to get very much the latest in battlefield injuries. And they are learning a whole lot from Ukraine veterans who are able to come over here.

And because of our relationship with Ukraine over the years, and so many of our alumni, some 4,000 to 5,000 alumni, many of them are members of parliament or even in the ministries by now, we are able to get permission to bring those people over here. It is very hard for Ukrainian soldiers to come over, but we are able to bring them over for a 10-day program. We also had women veterans from Ukraine who went to West Virginia.

Mr. MOORE. And I think you said this. So are these elected officials when they are coming over here? Or, generally, they are not, and then typically they will go on to become elected officials?

Ms. SARGUS. Most of them are not elected officials, but our parliamentary program grows each year. So we look for the elected official, and we work with the parliaments of these countries, also parliamentary staff, which are a very interesting cohort to bring over.

Mr. MOORE. Okay. So most of them then not being MPs or anything like that?

Ms. SARGUS. Not when they start, but sometimes our parliamentary program—well, our parliamentary program is for MPs.

Ukraine's parliamentary numbers, we have actually reached quite a few, but most of them are having a difficult time coming and traveling on the 10-day program.

So we do our best bringing them over and getting them congressional meetings and accessible to the institutions and the officials they need to meet, but there are challenges with that, of course.

Mr. MOORE. Are there other European countries that participate in this?

Ms. SARGUS. Yes. We work with Romania. We work with Hungary, Romania, Poland, the Balkans, the Baltic states. Parliamentary members from most of those countries have come over here.

Our newest program is in the Indo-Pacific where it is interesting for us to be working with parliaments of the countries of the Indo-Pacific. They are rather small. So one of our delegations represents 10 percent of their parliament. So we are able to make very deep inroads into that cohort in just a few delegations.

Mr. MOORE. And then are you familiar with the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue that takes place?

The TLD has been around for a long time. Do you feel that that might be duplicative since they are meeting twice a year, folks from the European Parliament, and then there is the NATO Parliamentary Assembly as well that has MPs from the NATO nations meeting with our congressional delegation multiple times a year? Does that seem a little bit duplicative?

Ms. SARGUS. I don't have a very deep knowledge of the programs you are talking about, but I believe the difference is that COIL programs are essentially in the American community by the end of it.

So they do spend 3 days here, the parliament members do spend 3 days here in Washington, but the rest of their time is in communities around the country. And that is where they work with State

legislatures, which are often more to scale for their own countries. So they learn about lawmaking and policy.

And one of the things that we found that our parliamentarians really want to know, they want to know why they can't have a CVC. So we talk to them about that. We talk to them about CRS. We talk about calendar. They don't have a congressional calendar.

So they want to know how you run so they can work that into their own processes. So we introduce them to speakers from CRS, and we take them to the CVC, and they meet with committee members. Committee membership is another thing that they find very interesting.

So while they do really important work here in Washington for 3 days, when they get to the State capitals they get a different kind and a much more focused kind of program, one that really tells them what they need to know.

Mr. MOORE. Yeah. I would urge you to take a look at this. So it is under Title 22. So it is over at—the Foreign Affairs Committee administers these.

Ms. SARGUS. Okay.

Mr. MOORE. But NATO Parliamentary Assembly, they come here, too. So they come here every year, and the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue comes here every year as well. And then there was the U.K.-U.S. Transatlantic—there are a bunch of these things over there. So there might be some efficiencies to be found in some of this, I guess is what I am trying to get at.

But, yeah, I would just urge you to take a look at it. Obviously, there is a new chairman of the committee over there. But I don't know if the British-U.S. one is still in existence. It was at one point.

Someone is nodding their head back there. Does it still happen?

But, yeah, there are a number of these that are over at the House Foreign Affairs Committee. I am speaking as former staff of the committee.

So, in any event, there could be some efficiencies to be found where you could try to synergize your efforts and maybe try to save us some money.

But, anyway, I appreciate it.

Yield back.

Ms. SARGUS. Thank you.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Moore.

I now recognize Mr. Strong for his 5 minutes.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you, Chairman Valadao.

And I thank each of our witnesses for being here today, and to your dedicated staff, for all the work you do to strengthen and support the United States Congress.

Dr. Pugh, what are some of the recent Stennis Center programs or initiatives you are most proud of? And what measurable impacts have you seen from them?

Mr. PUGH. Some that I am most proud of is with our Congressional Internship Program we have started making it a requirement for the congressional staffers that go through our program to write in our journal of Public Service Review.

And one of the best parts about that is students from all over the United States who don't have the resources to come and intern on

Capitol Hill, they can read about their stories. Our journal is available to everybody online at stennis.gov.

And so each spring, summer, and fall cohort that go through the Congressional Internship Program—and it is from all of your offices who apply—they write about their experience, and they can talk about maybe working with some constituents and just life in D.C., and I think it is really encouraging for other students to read about that.

So that is something that I am pretty proud of, and it doesn't cost us any money.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you.

If additional funding were available, what programmatic enhancements or expansions would the Center prioritize?

Mr. PUGH. Based on the interest of the Stennis Fellows Program, there is a possibility that that program can be—we can, instead of having 30 to 34, that can possibly be increased slightly. We have a few of our board members who have expressed interest in possibly growing that in the future. That would be the primary one.

But one of the best parts about that is, if we were to increase that in the future, that will create more senior Stennis fellows.

And I was mentioning earlier that that is how we have been able to save so much. It is because we do have so much free labor from these senior-level staffers that volunteer their time to all of our programs.

So we will have more senior Stennis fellows created.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you.

Ms. Sargus, you mentioned the COIL program provides unfiltered insights from delegates. How do you vet participants to ensure that they are not a threat to U.S. national security?

Ms. SARGUS. All of our participants are nominated. There is no self-nomination. There is no online application.

So we have trusted nominators in-country—usually the U.S. embassy staff—who know who that emerging leader is, and they provide a list of nominations, and they do the vetting. And then, of course, they are issued a J-1 visa.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you.

I know Huntsville, Alabama, had the opportunity to host a delegation in 2022. Are there any plans to bring future delegations back to Alabama? And could you walk us through how that process typically works?

Ms. SARGUS. Do we have—yes. Okay. My Alabama guy back there.

Yes. We do plan—we have done a lot of stuff in Alabama.

The process is that, in our annual grant outreach to our hosting organizations around the country, we ask who would like to do this theme or that theme or who would like to host at what time.

And because these are volunteer organizations, they really do need to see a calendar well in advance, and we give all of our current grantees an opportunity to choose next year's batch.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you.

What specific programming would COIL be forced to cut without this increase?

Ms. SARGUS. We would probably have to minimize somewhat our Indo-Pacific parliamentary program, even though we give that a very high level of priority, but it is the costliest.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you.

Now, turning to Mr. Crane, your board recently submitted recommendations for the 119th Congress. What are the most urgent legislative or policy changes you believe Congress should consider?

Mr. CRANE. In the board's report it makes—the report makes several recommendations to Congress to maintain parity with protections in the executive branch and the private sector.

One of those is especially important, and that is to require legislative branch offices to maintain records of workplace illnesses and injuries, as is required in the private sector and as is required in the executive branch. That way, our OSH investigators have materials that they can consult when investigating accidents and workplace injuries.

In addition, there is a very straightforward change that Congress could make to provide comparable nursing protections to legislative branch employees. Congress recently passed an act called the PUMP Act, the PUMP Act for working mothers, and that act expands protections for nursing employees, including providing reasonable break times and a private space to pump at work.

But because of what we think is a technical error when that law was enacted, legislative branch employees were excluded from coverage. We have notified our oversight committees and worked with them and provided them with technical language that would provide that benefit to legislative branch employees.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you, Mr. Crane.

Chairman Valadao, I yield back.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, Mr. Strong.

If there are no further questions, I would like to thank Mr. Pugh, Mr. Crane, and Ms. Sargus for being here today.

Members may submit any additional questions for the record.

And the subcommittee stands adjourned.

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



Office of Congressional Workplace Rights

Mission Statement

The Office of Congressional Workplace Rights (OCWR) was established by Congress in 1995 to administer the Congressional Accountability Act (CAA). **The mission of the OCWR is to advance workplace rights, safety and health, and accessibility in the legislative branch.** Its vision is a respectful, safe, healthy, and accessible congressional workplace with equal employment opportunity and treatment for all.

The CAA applies numerous employment, safety, and accessibility laws to the legislative branch that:

- Prohibit discrimination, harassment, and retaliation;
- Promote equal employment opportunity, including providing enhanced access to job opportunities for veterans;
- Govern working conditions, including minimum wage and overtime compensation, job-protected leave, paid parental leave, and unionization; and
- Require hazard-free workplaces that are accessible to people with disabilities.

OCWR administers the CAA by:

- Developing and providing outreach, education, and training programs tailored to the needs of the legislative branch community;
- Providing advising services to covered employees, on a privileged and confidential basis, about their rights and responsibilities under the CAA;
- Operating an Administrative Dispute Resolution program, including voluntary mediation and administrative hearings, to resolve alleged CAA violations;
- Investigating alleged violations of laws governing unionization, hazard-free workplaces, and accessibility, and prosecuting violations of such laws;
- Inspecting more than 18 million square feet of facilities and ground in the legislative branch to ensure that they are and remain hazard free and accessible;
- Providing each Congress with recommendations regarding the applicability to the legislative branch of workplace and accessibility laws, to ensure that they are equivalent to those laws applied to the executive branch and the private sector; and
- Administering a biennial Congressional Workplace Climate Survey of legislative branch employees and the workplace environment, including attitudes regarding sexual harassment.



advancing workplace rights, safety and health, and accessibility in the legislative branch

Office of Congressional Workplace Rights

FY 2026 Budget Justification

\$8,593,902 IN DISCRETIONARY FUNDING.

- Constitutes an increase of **\$443,902 or 5 percent above the continuing resolution amount for FY 2025.**
- Meets anticipated program costs associated with the OCWR's mandate to **administer the Congressional Accountability Act**, which applies numerous workplace, employment, safety, and accessibility laws to Congress and other employing offices of the legislative branch.
- **83 percent** of the requested amount would provide pay and benefits for **34 FTE positions**, including projected COLA increases.
- **17 percent** of requested funds would cover anticipated **non-personnel costs** associated with:
 - Continued implementation and administration of OCWR Programs, including:
 - A **Training and Education Program** to reduce the occurrence of workplace disputes;
 - An **Administrative Dispute Resolution Process** to resolve workplace disputes when they occur;
 - A mandated **Biennial Workplace Climate Survey** of legislative branch employees;
 - A **Program of Disability Access and Safety & Health Inspections** covering more than 18 million square feet of facilities and grounds; and
 - A **Program of Enforcement** of laws governing Disability Access, Safety & Health, and Labor-Management Relations in the legislative branch; and
 - Services, equipment, and supplies needed to operate the OCWR.

OCWR Appropriation Summary

	FY 2021 Actual	FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Actual	FY 2024 Actual	FY 2025 CR	FY 2026 Requested
Budget	\$7,500,000	\$7,500,000	\$8,000,000	\$8,150,000	\$8,150,000	\$8,593,902
% Change from Previous FY	18.43*	0	6.69	1.88	0	5.44
FTEs	31	31	34	34	34	34

* The 18.43% increase from FY 2020 - FTEs were associated with costs related to implementation of the changes embodied in the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995 Reform Act, which became effective in FY 2019.

FY2026 Budget Request Summary

To sustain, improve, and expand its mission through the Open World Program (OWP), the Congressional Office for International Leadership (COIL) respectfully requests a **\$1.2 million increase (20%)** in its FY2026 appropriation, bringing the total to **\$7.2 million**.

Justification for the Increase

- **Flat Funding for Over a Decade**
COIL has operated with an appropriation at or below \$6 million for the past 13 budget cycles.
- **Rising Personnel Costs**
Since 2019, cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) increases are nearing 20% for salaries, while benefit rates have risen by at least 7%.
- **Escalating Compliance Costs**
COIL's annual audit expenses have more than doubled since 2019, now exceeding \$94,000.
- **Increased Program Delivery Costs**
The per-delegate cost has doubled since 2019 due to:
 - Rising grant expenses (e.g., van rental, drivers, fuel, meals)
 - Higher logistical contract rates for labor and travel coordination
 - Increased airfare—flights from the Indo-Pacific are up to 30% more expensive than those from Europe
- **Maximized Cost-Sharing with Local Partners**
Local host organizations are now contributing at their maximum capacity.
- **High Demand for Programming**
Due to current funding constraints, COIL must decline over one-third of all grant proposals annually. This restricts the reach and impact of COIL's congressional diplomacy efforts in American communities.

<i>Appropriation History</i>				
Fiscal Year	Requested	Enacted	% Change	FTEs
2025	\$7,200,000	\$6,000,000	0%	8.1*
2024	\$6,000,000	\$6,000,000	0%	6.8
2023	\$6,000,000	\$6,000,000	0%	9.3
2022	\$6,000,000	\$6,000,000	2%	8.6
2021	\$5,900,000	\$5,900,000	0%	8.7
*Estimated number of Full-Time Employees for 2025				

Mission Summary

The Congressional Office for International Leadership (COIL) is a legislative branch agency with three key functions: (1) informing Congress about global developments in strategically significant countries and regions, (2) connecting Congress with current and emerging leaders worldwide to foster productive relationships, and (3) facilitating meaningful exchanges between Americans and citizens of critical nations to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation.

COIL accomplishes these objectives through the Open World Program (OWP), a 10-day professional leadership exchange program designed to engage international delegates with Congress and American communities. The program has two components: **Capitol Connections** and **Community Partnerships**:

1. **Capitol Connections:** Delegates spend up to three days in Washington, D.C., engaging in a focused agenda that includes meetings with Members of Congress and staff to discuss pressing global challenges and to establish professional connections.
2. **Community Partnerships:** Delegates then travel to host communities across the United States and are paired with local partners who organize programming and provide homestay experiences that foster cultural and professional exchange at the grassroots level.

The OWP is a unique initiative that strengthens U.S. relations with congressionally identified strategic countries and regions, fostering long-term collaboration. As the only congressionally appropriated exchange program dedicated to the legislative branch, COIL operates in close coordination with other U.S. government agencies (such as embassies and the Department of Veterans Affairs) that help identify exceptional participants. By building personal connections and enhancing understanding, COIL supports Congress in advancing U.S. foreign policy objectives while benefiting American communities nationwide.

In 2024, COIL hosted 626 emerging leaders from 24 countries, facilitating discussions with Members of Congress and connecting delegates to over 350 host families in 77 American communities across 37 states. These efforts promote vital relationships, create a positive impression of the United States, and expose international leaders to democratic values and practices. Congruently, these congressional relationships can be leveraged by Members to improve foreign policy acumen and generate partnerships for their constituents and the U.S. government writ large.

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**Testimony of Dr. Brian Pugh, Executive Director
John C. Stennis Center for Public Service Training and Development**

Mission:

To promote and strengthen public service in America. The Stennis Center's mandate is to attract young people to careers in public service, to provide training for state and local officials, and to offer development opportunities for congressional staff. Products of the Stennis Center include training and professional development programs, conferences and seminars, one-on-one mentoring, and written publications.



FY 2026 Budget Summary

The Stennis Center for Public Service is requesting level funding, which is \$430,000. The Stennis Center strives to present the highest quality programs for congressional staff at the lowest possible cost. The Stennis Center has been operating on the same funding level for multiple years now. The appropriations request for FY 2026 is essential to enable the Stennis Center to continue to provide training and development opportunities to congressional staff as mandated by its authorizing legislation. Without the appropriation, the highly successful Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program, Emerging Congressional Staff Leaders Program, and Stennis Program for Congressional Interns would be severely reduced, if not eliminated.

FY 2026 Budget Request Detail

Congressional Staff Programs (by Program Activity)

Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program	\$300,000
Emerging Congressional Staff Leaders Program	25,000
Stennis Leadership Program for Congressional Interns/Students	60,000
Civil-Military Leadership Program for Members and Staff	20,000
Senior Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program	25,000
Total	\$430,000

(by Object Classification)

Personnel	\$243,500
Direct Program Costs (including speakers, facilities, travel, food and lodging)	159,700
Office Lease and Utilities	20,500
Printing, Copying and Postage	1,300
Equipment and Supplies	5,000
Total	\$430,000

As a Legislative Branch agency established to promote and strengthen the highest ideals of public service, the Stennis Center is uniquely positioned to provide training and development opportunities for congressional staff. Like their counterparts in the Executive Branch and similar to professionals in the private sector, congressional staff benefits from opportunities to strengthen their skills through training and development. Furthermore, the design of the Stennis Center's congressional programs enables staffers across chamber and party lines to learn from each other and build relationships that would otherwise not be possible. The Stennis Center is grateful for the opportunity to work with such highly-qualified individuals committed to public service in the Legislative Branch and eager for opportunities to develop their abilities further.



**Testimony of Dr. Brian Pugh, Executive Director
John C. Stennis Center for Public Service Training and Development**

Good morning Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Dr. Brian Pugh, Executive Director of the John C. Stennis Center for Public Service Training and Development ("Stennis Center"). I am honored to speak to you today about the Stennis Center's \$430,000 appropriations request that funds our Congressional Programs.

History and Mission

The Stennis Center was established in 1988 by Public Law 100-458¹ with the statutory mission to 1) promote public service to young people and to get them interested in a career in public service, 2) to provide training and professional development opportunities to state and local elected officials and their staff, and 3) to provide training and professional development opportunities to Congressional staff.² We are overseen by a Board of Trustees that are required by law to be appointed by House and Senate leadership.³

Our programs that meet the third prong of our mission – to provide training and development opportunities to Congressional staff – are known as our Congressional Programs. Because the Stennis Center's request is for expenses related to these programs, I will focus on discussing those.

Congressional Programs

The Stennis Center has multiple ways that it meets its mandate to provide training and development opportunities to Congressional staff. Our flagship program is the Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program ("Stennis Fellows Program"). Established during the 103rd Congress, the Stennis Fellows Program is a year-and-a-half-long program that focuses on the challenges to Congress as an institution of American democracy and the role that Congressional staff play in meeting those challenges.

¹ Codified at 2 U.S.C. §1101 - 10.

² 2 U.S.C. § 1104.

³ *Id.* at §1103(b).

The Stennis Fellows Program occurs every Congress and selects 30-34 bipartisan, bicameral senior Congressional staff members to engage in professional development designed to help them be better managers and leaders, as well as be more productive staff members. The program includes roundtable discussions of relevant topics such as polarization, managing across a generational divide, staff capacity, and separation of powers. We also host overnight stays at a university such as Princeton University as well as the National Conservation Training Center.

Once a Stennis Fellow completes the program we then “graduate” them to Senior Stennis Fellows. These Senior Fellows play a vital role in the rest of our Congressional programming and our ability to meet the other two prongs of our mission. Given that these Senior Fellows are current or former staff, they have expert levels of knowledge and understanding about key facets of Congress. They are committed to public service and the institution of Congress specifically, and they can play a wide range of roles in the rest of our programs. Senior Fellows can speak on topics such as the Appropriations process or managing a Congressional office. They can mentor young staff to help them grow as a Congressional staffer and stay longer on the Hill. They can explain the legislative process to interns who are interested in becoming full-time staff. And they can share their personal experiences to show that public service can come from all walks of life. There are currently over 400 Senior Stennis Fellows and in the 118th Congress we had almost 100 opportunities for them to volunteer their time to our programs.

Another of the Stennis Center’s Congressional Programs is the Emerging Congressional Staff Leaders Program (“Emerging Leaders Program”). This is a one-on-one mentoring program where we pair a junior or mid-level staffer with a Senior Stennis Fellow. Though this, too, is a bipartisan, bicameral program, the Stennis Center strives to match mentees with a mentor who shares similar political ideology, issue area expertise, and, when appropriate, the same chamber of Congress. In addition to one-on-one mentoring, this program provides participants with roughly four group sessions to discuss topics such as advancing a legislative agenda, parliamentary procedure with the House and Senate Parliamentarians, and other relevant topics. The Emerging Leaders Program runs in the second half of every Congressional session.

Our final Congressional Program is the Stennis Program for Congressional Interns (“Stennis Intern Program”). The Stennis Intern Program is a bipartisan, bicameral program that hosts roughly 30 students every spring, summer, and fall for five two-hour sessions on institutional aspects of Congress. These sessions are led by experts – typically Senior Stennis Fellows – about a specific topic and provide the interns with an opportunity to ask questions and network with these experts. We also provide them with a small group project where they are tasked with advising a fake Member of Congress and then are paired up with a Senior Stennis Fellow to discuss the finer points of being a legislative staffer.

In addition to these Congressional Programs, we have a quarterly journal called *Public Service Review*, which is dedicated to the publication and dissemination of young people’s

reflections and experiences in the public service sector through professional or volunteer opportunities. The purpose of the journal is to acknowledge and influence the important and substantive work carried out by young people in local, state, and federal government entities, universities and colleges, and nonprofit organizations across the United States. Participants selected for the Stennis Intern Program are required to write an article about their experience in *Public Service Review* and, in some cases, interns volunteer to serve on the journal's editorial board. Senior Fellows and Emerging Leaders may also provide content for *Public Service Review*.

FY 2026 Budget Summary

The Stennis Center for Public Service is requesting level funding, which is \$430,000. The Stennis Center strives to present the highest quality programs for congressional staff at the lowest possible cost. The Stennis Center has been operating on the same funding level for multiple years now. The appropriations request for FY 2026 is essential to enable the Stennis Center to continue to provide training and development opportunities to congressional staff as mandated by its authorizing legislation. Without the appropriation, the highly successful Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program, Emerging Congressional Staff Leaders Program, and Stennis Program for Congressional Interns would be severely reduced, if not eliminated.

Budget Request Details

Congressional Staff Programs (by Program Activity)

Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program	\$300,000
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Office Lease and Utilities	20,500
Printing, Copying and Postage	1,300
Equipment and Supplies	<u>5,000</u>
Total	\$430,000

Cost Saving Measures and Increased Program Participation

As I noted, the Stennis Center is requesting level funding for fiscal year 2026. This is the same amount of funding that we have requested in previous years. The Stennis Center has been able to keep level funding despite increased costs because of two main strategies.

The first strategy has been to consistently evaluate ways that we can save money without substantially impacting the quality of our programs. The money saved can then be used in other ways that improve our programs or – as has been the case in recent years – offset rising costs. One of my proudest cost saving measures has been our recent move to the Library of Congress. At the beginning of the 2025 fiscal year, the Stennis Center moved from a leased space in a private office building to the Adams building at the Library of Congress. If you factor in the savings from services such as utilities and parking, the total yearly savings is almost \$50,000, which is the equivalent of 11.5% of our budget request.

However, this is not the only benefit to moving to the Library. Because it is so much larger than the Stennis Center, the Library can potentially provide us with services that would otherwise cost us exponentially more if we were to contract out on an ad hoc basis. These conversations are currently on going, but we hope to have other examples of our fruitful relationship with the Library of Congress in the years to come.

While our move to the Library is the most noteworthy example of cost savings, I would like to provide a couple examples of how we have adjusted our programs to save costs while maintaining their high quality. One example is the cost of food and refreshments for the Stennis Intern Program. While I am a big believer in southern hospitality and always having food for your guests, we decided in 2022 to cut back on the food that we provided to the program.⁴ This allowed us to go from hosting the Stennis Intern Program once a year to three times a year. Because we utilize event space in the Capitol Visitor Center for this program, we were ultimately able to increase the number of participants threefold at no additional cost. Similarly, we were able to cut the cost of event space for the Stennis Fellows program by moving our roundtables to the Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital. The Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital is considerably cheaper than other options in D.C. because it is run by a nonprofit organization. These cost savings allowed us to expand the number of roundtables from four to six.

The second strategy that the Stennis Center has employed to limit programmatic costs is that we have created a system where our programs can build upon themselves without adding costs to the Stennis Center. What this means in practice is that once someone has gone through one of our programs, they are much more likely to volunteer their time to give back to us and the institution of Congress. While this is difficult to quantify into an actual dollar amount, it does mean that we can have expert panelist speakers, seasoned veterans

⁴ The Stennis Center is authorized pursuant to 2 U.S.C. §1108(a)(7) to make "expenditures for meals, entertainment and refreshments in connection with official training sessions or other authorized programs."

to mentor young staff, and even interns serving on the editorial board of our *Public Service Review* journal all on a volunteer basis.

Finally, I would like to close by briefly bragging about our Congressional Programs. Despite the level funding, interest in our programs continues to increase. Over the course of the 118th Congress, we had 248 individuals participate and complete their respective programming. Further, the number of applicants to our programs has increased significantly. As an example, the number of applicants for the 119th Stennis Fellows program was 122. This is a 27% increase from the number of applicants in the 118th Congress and almost a 200% increase from the ten-year average.⁵ We believe that these kinds of statistics show that congressional staff value our programs and we plan to continue to provide them at the highest quality possible.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today about the Stennis Center's appropriation request and our Congressional Programs. I look forward to any questions you may have.

⁵ This includes five application periods for the 114th Congress through the 118th Congress.

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