

Statement of Mary B. Mazanec
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Committee on Rules and Administration
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Chairwoman Klobuchar, Ranking Member Blunt and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today on behalf of the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS values its role as Congress's trusted resource and is committed to providing exceptional information, research, and analytical service to every Member and committee. With today's testimony, I will highlight some of the more noteworthy support the Service has provided to Congress during this challenging and unprecedented period and update the Committee with respect to a number of important initiatives that CRS has undertaken.

SERVICE TO CONGRESS

Despite the enormous disruption caused by the global pandemic, I am pleased to report that CRS continues to successfully carry out its mission to provide Congress "the highest quality of research, analysis, information, and confidential consultation, to support the exercise of its legislative, representational, and oversight duties." Of course, this would not be possible but-for the incredible resilience and dedication of CRS staff and I would like to thank my colleagues for their hard work in fulfilling this important responsibility.

In March of 2020, as news of the impending pandemic grew increasingly dire, CRS worked quickly to ensure that it would continue to support Congress's needs during any prolonged pandemic event. Within 24 hours, the Service transitioned its entire operation, expanding existing workplace flexibilities to enable staff to work remotely full-time. As a result, CRS was well-positioned to provide Congress with timely analysis, information, and consultative support as it considered the plethora of issues presented by this public health crisis. From March 2020 through August 2021, CRS prepared and regularly updated over 1100 new products on COVID-19-related issues. To enable expedited access to these products, a COVID-19 resource page was developed on the CRS.gov and Congress.gov websites, organizing CRS prepared material under

26 issue areas, covering topics ranging from the temporary moratorium on evictions provided under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to frequently asked questions regarding testing for COVID-19. Several of these products incorporated custom CRS graphics, for which CRS leveraged visual design tools and technology. In addition, CRS experts responded to over 10,000 inquiries on COVID-related subjects.

In addition to COVID-19 related issues, CRS has recently assisted Congress in its consideration of many other policy and legal questions. CRS experts have provided extensive research and analytical support on issues including border security; climate change; cybersecurity; federal disaster relief and emergency management; US-China trade relations; tax policy; immigration; and the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. In addition, analysts and attorneys provided guidance on the legislative process, congressional oversight, and the annual appropriations bills, and supported the Senate's consideration of judicial and executive branch nominations. CRS also continued its offering of seminars and programs for congressional staff, including sessions on Understanding Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Law Enforcement Use of Facial Recognition Technology; the Federal Law Update series; and numerous programs addressing military and defense-related issues. Due to the pandemic, the Service quickly transitioned its in-person programs and seminars to webinar format.

During fiscal year 2020, CRS experts responded to over 75,000 congressional requests; prepared over 1300 new products; updated over 2500 existing products; and conducted live and virtual seminars that were attended by approximately 8500 congressional staff. As in previous years, the Service provided support to almost every Member and committee office through the provision of its products and services.

CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Today's Congress is confronted with an ever-increasing workload of complex public policy issues, during a time of constrained budgets and resources. In addition, technological innovations have afforded Congress immediate access to vast amounts of information from a multitude of sources, not all of which are authoritative or without bias. This has created and elevated expectations on the part of congressional users that the information and analysis that they require from CRS will be readily available and accessible whenever and wherever they wish

to retrieve it. As a result, CRS constantly examines its work model and explores areas where it can optimize its support to Congress. The following is a summary of the Service's progress in advancing some of the key initiatives undertaken to achieve this objective.

Survey of Congressional Staff

CRS is constantly capturing feedback from congressional stakeholders to assess the Service's progress in meeting the needs of Congress. Most recently, in fiscal 2020, CRS contracted with Gallup, Inc., to conduct a survey of congressional staff designed to gauge the value and utility of various research products and consultative services offered by CRS, as well as to gather information about how such products and services are used by Congress. Gallup contacted over 13,700 congressional staff from early February through mid-March 2020 and received survey responses from over 1300 district, state, and DC-based staff members. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and CRS is assessing the information gathered from this and other outreach efforts to inform strategic and operational decision making and improvements to its product and service offerings.

Data Collection and Analytics

The Service has developed tools to assess the use of CRS products and services and to provide insights on congressional interests. A major area of data collection has involved understanding CRS.gov usage by congressional users. These efforts include the capture and analysis of search terms utilized on CRS.gov and use analysis of general pages on the site, topic pages, and CRS products.

Beyond assessment of website use, CRS has developed prototype data analytic tools to reflect the scope and depth of CRS service to Congress. These tools have been used by CRS management to anticipate and evaluate work demands, understand the range of clients receiving consultative services, and help ensure that CRS reaches all Members and committees. CRS continues to explore new data available from congressional and public use of CRS products, websites, and services.

Improving Recruitment and Retention of a Diverse Workforce

A dedicated, diverse, professional CRS workforce is essential to meet the needs of a 21st century Congress. To this end, CRS continues to recruit, retain, and professionally develop a diverse, highly skilled staff with the required expertise to address the myriad issues facing Congress. For example, the Service has expanded its capacity in science and technology, creating 12 additional positions in multiple divisions to strengthen and deepen analysis of multidisciplinary policy topics where science and technology issues have a substantive component. Recognizing that Congress serves an increasingly diverse constituency, CRS has developed and begun to execute a recruitment plan for merit selection positions that intensifies outreach to potential applicants from underrepresented groups. During fiscal year 2021, CRS participated in 42 recruitment events, many of which were sponsored by minority-serving institutions and schools or organizations with a focus on underrepresented groups.

With regard to professional development, CRS provides training on writing and core presentation skills. In addition, the Service has hosted a number of learning sessions for staff, aimed at fostering a more inclusive and respectful workplace, including: “Connecting with Respect;” ”Microaggressions in Everyday Life;” “Anti-Harassment Training;” and “Embracing Allyship.” Additionally, CRS staff participate in the Library’s Career and Leadership Development Programs, as well as the Library’s Supervisory Development Program.

Knowledge Management

Capturing and preserving CRS’s institutional knowledge is an important component of the Service’s ability to provide exceptional service to Congress. Thus, CRS is developing and implementing strategies to manage, preserve, and capture this valuable asset for use by current and future CRS staff. The Service utilizes its Research Portal as a hub for digital resources, to provide staff with quick and easy access to information needed to research, analyze, and advise on legislative issues. The Research Portal has been particularly useful during the COVID-19 pandemic, while most CRS staff have been working from home. In addition, CRS is engaging in efforts to ensure the capture and timely transfer of the tacit knowledge held by senior analysts, attorneys, and information professionals. Activities to facilitate the sharing of information, knowledge, and best practices have enabled new staff to learn from the experience of their

colleagues. In fiscal 2021, CRS established a Knowledge Management Advisory Group to work closely with the research divisions and offices on knowledge management and to develop plans for the preservation of tacit knowledge.

IT Modernization/Integrated Research and Information Systems (IRIS)

The pandemic experience underscores how critical information technology is for the Service to accomplish its mission. CRS continues to work with the Library's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) to modernize its IT infrastructure with the deployment of new tools and software to enhance support to congressional stakeholders. The Integrated Research and Information System (IRIS) initiative is a multi-year effort to update the Service's mission-specific information technology to provide CRS staff with the best resources to create and deliver products and services to Congress. CRS and OCIO are currently implementing several major work streams. These efforts include updating the client relationship management and workforce information management systems, improving the text analysis program to provide greater ease of conducting legislative analysis and comparisons, streamlining the content management system, and enhancing the taxonomy tool for better search results. These improvements are in varying stages of development and implementation.

Congress.gov

With its ongoing development cycle for Congress.gov, CRS puts the highest priority on supporting the information needs of Congress. CRS and the Library actively engage the Secretary of the Senate and Senate Sergeant at Arms data partners to modernize processes used to exchange data for Congress.gov. These modernization efforts will better safeguard congressional data by retiring less secure legacy data processing workflows, and establish the foundation for future enhancements. In August, the Library's Congressional Relations Office shared with the Committee a brief video demonstrating significant improvements in Congress.gov that were inspired by congressional staff feedback.

CONCLUSION

CRS is honored to serve as a trusted and reliable resource for Congress during this difficult period in our nation's history. The accomplishments outlined above are a testament to CRS's

commitment to support Congress with timely, authoritative research, analysis, and information, notwithstanding the challenges that we now face. On behalf of my colleagues at CRS, I would like to express my appreciation to the Committee for your continued support.