

Statement of Dennis M. Roth
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before the
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
CRS Fiscal 2012 Budget Request
May 11, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Honda, and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Dennis Roth and I am president of the Congressional Research Employees Association. On behalf of all our members, I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity today to share our thoughts and concerns on the FY 2012 budget as well as other matters regarding the Congressional Research Service. The Congressional Research Employees Association represents over 500 bargaining unit CRS employees of which 265 are currently dues paying members.

Budget

We realize that the budget for the Legislative Branch and its agencies is very tight now and will be for several years to come. Knowing that, I would like to make the case why this subcommittee should try to maintain the current level of service that CRS provides the Congress.

Among the many responsibilities given to CRS, we believe three demonstrate why the Congress needs to maintain CRS at the highest levels possible.

First, CRS analysts and attorneys are statutorily responsible for analyzing, appraising, and evaluating legislative proposals and aiding Congress in determining the advisability of enacting such proposals; (2) estimating the probable results of such proposals and their alternatives; and (3) evaluating alternative methods for accomplishing these results.

Second, CRS information specialists are statutorily required to prepare and provide information, research, and reference materials and services to assist Congress in legislative and representative functions. These CRS staff also assist analysts in their work. Any of you who perform searches on the internet know how frustrating it can be when you get thousands of hits. Our professionals efficiently and effectively find the information being sought.

Third, CRS legislative analysts are statutorily required to prepare summaries and digests of bills and resolutions of a public general nature introduced in the Senate or House of Representatives. Both the Legislative Information Service (LIS), which is dedicated to Congressional use, and THOMAS, which is available to the public, aid Congress in its

representative and legislative responsibilities by providing bill analysis, status of legislative action, and other useful information.

These primary functions are carried out in confidence and without partisan bias.

In addition, technical and support staff, editors and publishers, and other CRS employees assure that CRS is available and prepared to meet congressional requests and needs in a timely and efficient manner. These individuals are the backbone of CRS service to Congress.

In his written testimony, former CRS Director Dan Mulhollan noted that the Congressional Research Service should be seen as a shared resource. We agree and I would like to expound somewhat further on this concept. Not only are we a shared resource, we are a resource with deep and unique institutional knowledge for Congress. We are also a resource that addresses the specific needs of the Congress rather than other priorities. Often unrecognized is the depth and breadth of our research and information professionals and their ability to furnish Members of Congress, their staff, or their constituents, with just the right information given the requesters' background in the area. CRS staff can help a requester understand an issue from its simplest to its most complicated elements. And, CRS can do this in a relatively short time frame.

There are many sources to which the Congress can turn to, but none are committed to the statutory requirement of "responding [without partisan bias] most expeditiously, effectively, and efficiently to the special needs of Congress." CRS products are tailor made for the Congress.

The Congress gets all these services with a non-supervisory, non-managerial staff of little more than 500. We believe the Congress is receiving the most effective and efficient service. And any reductions in Congressional staff make the functions carried out by CRS even more important to maintain and sustain.

Choosing a new CRS Director

The Subcommittee is aware that CRS Director Dan Mulhollan retired at the beginning of April. By statute a new Director will be appointed by the Librarian after consultation with the Joint Committee on the Library. Although this subcommittee has no direct statutory role in the Director's selection, the Subcommittee has shown an interest in the management of CRS in the past.

In its Report 111-160, the House included the following:

CRS Services Evaluation.--The Congressional Research Service (CRS) is an invaluable and highly productive asset for the U.S. Congress and for the public. Its staff provides high quality research to Members and Committees and functions in many cases essentially as extensions of the Congressional legislative staff of the House and the Senate. Notwithstanding this record of accomplishment, the Committee is concerned that

the CRS, partially because of the increased use of electronic communications and the adoption of new staff structures, may have become less connected to the Committees and Member Offices it serves. The Committee requests that the Director take steps to evaluate the validity of these concerns including the conduct of a formal evaluation of how well its current staffing models and procedures meet user needs. The Committee also directs that the Congressional Research Service consider creation of a new mechanism such as a Member Advisory Committee which would allow routine discussions between CRS leadership and users.

A seminal finding of this evaluation was that: “To increase responsiveness [to the Congress], CRS should develop an approach to proactively understand, target, and address the unique needs of its diverse client segment.” We believe that this is best accomplished if the new Director of CRS has been intimately involved with the Congress for a significant period of time. In previous testimony before this Subcommittee, Director Mulhollan noted that it takes three to five years to train an analyst to understand and be responsive to the needs of the Congress. We believe this is also true with CRS leadership. Thus, we believe a primary criterion for selecting a new Director should be an established familiarity with the Congress.

About a year ago the Library participated in the 2010 Employee Survey administered by the Office of Personnel Management. Two areas identified by CRS staff as needing improvement were:

- the “feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work processes” (only 36 percent of staff felt this was happening) and
- creativity and innovation are rewarded (only 33 percent believed that this was happening in CRS)

The new CRS Director must be willing to engage staff through meaningful discussions so that they can offer suggestions on how they do their work. A 2009 study¹ by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board found that “Supervisors in high engagement agencies define clear performance expectations, develop strong working relationships with employees, provide employees with useful feedback, and recognize their contributions.” The new Director should be willing to create an environment that welcomes creativity and innovation and seriously considers employees viewpoints.

CRS is a multigenerational organization composed of baby boomers, Generation Xers, and Generation Y/Millennials. The new Director of CRS must be able to lead, engage, and motivate these generations simultaneously. This can be accomplished through strong communications skills as well as a willingness to listen and to enact appropriate change.

Finally, we believe that the selection process should be transparent. Even though the Librarian, in consultation with the Joint Committee on the Library, appoints the Director,

¹ Managing for Engagement – Communication, Connection, and Courage. A Report to the President and the Congress of the United States by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, July 2009

we believe the Librarian should advertise for candidates and conduct interviews. By conducting a national search, the best candidates can be identified and someone who can work both with the Congress and CRS staff selected.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to appear before you today and I would be happy to address any questions you may have.