

Statement of Mary B. Mazanec
Director, Congressional Research Service
Before the
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Fiscal 2017 Budget Request
March 15, 2016

Madame Chairman, Ranking Member Schatz and Members of the Subcommittee,

I appreciate the opportunity to present the fiscal 2017 budget request for the Congressional Research Service (CRS). As you know, CRS has provided a unique service to all Members of Congress and committees for over a hundred years - delivering research and analysis without advocacy or agenda. In CRS, Congress has at its disposal dedicated specialized expertise and information resources ready to support any issue that may arise.

Our experts work hand-in-hand with your offices on a daily basis. Senators and staff know they can count on CRS to be confidential, objective, nonpartisan, authoritative, and timely. We align our work with the congressional agenda from the moment a new issue arises and continue to meet the needs of lawmakers throughout all stages of the legislative process. CRS analysts proactively examine the nature and extent of the full range of problems facing Congress, anticipate upcoming issues, identify and assess policy options, and assist with hearings on legislative proposals and on implementation of existing policies.

In the last fiscal year, the Service offered Members and staff multifaceted, in-depth support across a wide spectrum of complex and diverse issues, with our experts providing more than 62,000 responses to requests for custom research and analysis. By the end of the fiscal year, CRS produced over 3,600 new or updated written products, summarized over 8,000 bills for the legislative digest, and hosted over 300 seminars, briefings, and other events for more than 7,400 congressional participants.

FISCAL 2017 BUDGET REQUEST

The CRS budget request for fiscal 2017 is \$114,408,000, with almost ninety percent devoted to pay and benefits for our staff. That is a seven percent increase from fiscal 2016, the majority of which would serve simply to keep inflation and pay increases

from eroding our base budget even further. This request will position CRS to face the challenges ahead and continue to deliver the extensive support we provide to Congress.

BUDGET CHALLENGES

Congress expects CRS to maintain the ability to offer comprehensive, timely and authoritative research and analysis on the full range of issues important to the American people. In addition, we are expected to employ the most up-to-date analytical techniques and methodologies, and to present our analysis in readily accessible and highly usable formats.

In this time of static budgets and reduced purchasing power, meeting congressional expectations is growing more challenging for the Service; particularly in a research setting characterized by increasingly complex issues, the explosion of data sources and the fast moving information environment in which the Congress operates. CRS must be positioned to nimbly navigate these challenges to support a twenty-first century Congress.

Since 2010, CRS's purchasing power has been reduced by thirteen percent. Cost containments and increased operational efficiencies have mitigated the effects of this shortfall on the ability of the Service to provide timely support to the Congress. However, existing CRS capabilities are stretched exceedingly thin to meet current congressional requests, while maintaining the high quality of our research and consultative services. CRS staff levels have decreased by nearly ten percent over the past five years, and CRS experts are performing more work with fewer resources. For example, seventeen active staff in the defense policy and budget areas now perform the work done by twenty-five people just a few years ago. In the current budget climate, the Service is unable to hire behind every analyst who retires. As a result, portfolios have been divided and reassigned to the remaining staff.

If CRS capabilities are not enhanced commensurate with the Congress's demand for our services over the next few years, we anticipate that:

- the ability of CRS to conduct in-depth research and analysis will be adversely impacted as existing staffing gaps intensify, with the Service facing challenges acquiring necessary new expertise, and retaining its invaluable cadre of experienced experts;

- the Service will not be able to effectively procure and utilize new technologies and leverage the increasingly vast amount of data that could provide critical insight for congressional decision making;
- areas of consistently heavy congressional demand, including education, health care, defense, and appropriations will increasingly be impaired by staffing constraints, and timeliness for responses to requests and updating of research products may be adversely impacted due to staff workload; and
- the Service's ability to effectively perform all of the functions required by statute will diminish.

FISCAL 2017 PROGRAMMATIC INCREASE REQUEST

High workloads and coverage gaps risk jeopardizing CRS's ability to provide Congress with the expertise it depends on to carry out the Nation's business. To help ensure that CRS can continue to meet congressional expectations, the budget request includes a programmatic increase of \$3.106 million to fund a total of 22 FTEs to allow the Service to secure additional specialized technical skills and policy expertise necessary for research and analysis in support of the Congress.

This funding would allow CRS to add twelve FTEs to strengthen capacity in issue areas of high demand which are currently significantly understaffed. Many of the key analysts in areas such as defense, education, healthcare, appropriations, and budget are handling two to four times the average number of requests per analyst, per year.

The increased funding would also allow the Service to hire seven FTEs to fill emerging gaps in technology policy, data management and analysis, and data visualization – three areas identified in our strategic planning effort that would have a widespread, positive, and immediate impact on service to the Congress. Of the seven FTEs, the funding would provide for four analysts focused on technology policy – enabling CRS to better respond to questions around the use of emerging technology in areas like national security, e-finance, transportation, and biotechnology; all of these are areas of growing congressional interest, which we anticipate will spur an increasing number of requests for the Service.

The Service is receiving more requests to analyze 'big data' sets that can help inform policy decisions. Of the seven FTEs, the funding would also provide two positions focused on data management and analysis and an additional position focused on data

visualization – to enable us to deliver complex information in a more readily digestible format.

The budget increase would also allow the Service to make improvements to the *Constitution of the United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation* (popularly known as the Constitution Annotated or CONAN), the highly regarded and widely used comprehensive treatise on constitutional law that CRS maintains pursuant to statutory mandate. We recently brought in a prominent constitutional scholar to review CONAN and make recommendations on how to modernize and increase its accessibility and usability for Congress, constitutional scholars, and the public at large. The budget increase would support three legislative attorneys with expertise in constitutional law to perform the complex legal research and analysis that is critical to the success of this modernization project.

Cognizant of the current budget environment, we have taken significant steps to manage our responsibilities within our current resources. We have restructured our recruitment strategy to bring in more entry-level analysts who can work on a wide variety of issues. And we have created new position types – such as our research assistants – bringing in highly talented entry-level staff to assist analysts with data collection and the production of research. Staff capacity is being grown using in-house, entry-level hiring programs and leveraging low-cost staffing strategies, such as volunteer interns, phased retirements, and temporary appointments. Contract staff are used where appropriate.

However, there is a practical limit to the capacity and flexibility of CRS staff to absorb additional subject-area assignments while maintaining the knowledge, experience, and expertise necessary to offer timely, in-depth, authoritative research and analysis on the full range of issues important to the American people. While some issues can be anticipated and properly planned for, others appear rapidly and need to be answered immediately. To be able to meet that demand, the Service is compelled to maintain senior staff capable of addressing detailed questions that arise in a wide range of specialties.

LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT FOR CONGRESS

To better illustrate the range of specialties we must maintain on staff, I'd like to provide the Committee a sample of the breadth and depth of services CRS provided last year.

On the domestic front, the budget, debt, and deficit continued to drive significant demand for research and analysis. Our experts supported the debate over the fiscal

2015 and fiscal 2016 budgets by analyzing budget trends and the impact of recent legislation. Congress called on CRS to examine a number of specific issues such as the impact of the Budget Control Act on federal spending, and issues associated with reaching the debt limit.

Immigration and healthcare remained very active as well. On immigration, CRS wrote extensively on legal and policy issues raised by the executive branch's actions, "sanctuary" jurisdictions, and related national security concerns. With respect to the Affordable Care Act, CRS provided broad and deep coverage on the law's implementation and potential legislative alternatives. CRS health experts also provided research and analysis pertaining to emerging health reform legislation and worked extensively on issues relating to the passage of the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act.

CRS supported several other major congressional initiatives. Analysts and attorneys worked closely with both the Senate and House on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Our finance and trade staff worked extensively on issues around the reauthorization of the Export-Import Bank. We also provided in-depth support for congressional action on transportation and energy legislation, and defense department reform efforts.

When Congress sought to develop a compendium of tax expenditures, CRS analysts provided a comprehensive assessment of each and every one. Analysts also reviewed the potential policy and economic consequences of the various tax reform initiatives proposed by Members, the White House, and outside think tanks, and supported the deliberations over extending expiring tax provisions.

The fiscal year also saw several major social issues capture congressional interest. The Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, legalizing same-sex marriages, raised a host of questions for CRS attorneys. CRS provided analytical support and consultative service to the Congress as it held hearings, introduced legislation, and debated issues pertaining to fetal tissue donation and funding for reproductive health services. Mass shootings and questions about race relations and the proper use of force by law enforcement required impartial CRS policy and legal analysis.

In the international arena, ongoing violent conflicts abroad, political upheavals, power disputes, nuclear proliferation pressures, and major refugee and humanitarian dilemmas captured significant congressional attention in the past fiscal year. CRS experts were readily on hand to help with these critical issues.

CRS assisted the Congress by analyzing the international struggle against the Islamic State and other terrorist groups, not only in Syria and Iraq, but also in Libya, Yemen, Egypt, and various sub-Saharan African countries. The Congress also sought CRS assistance as lawmakers considered presidential authority to engage in military operations against the Islamic State and debated options for new or revised congressional authorization for the use of military force.

The Iran nuclear deal prompted numerous requests for legal and policy analyses by CRS on what the agreement required of Iran, the United States, and the other parties; the current status of Iran's nuclear program; and the role of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Experts assisted with issues such as how the deal might alter Iran's regional policies, including aid to terror groups, and how key U.S. partners in the region, including Israel and Saudi Arabia, viewed the agreement. CRS also examined the sanctions provisions of the agreement, including which sanctions were designated to be lifted, which ones would remain, which sanctions would be brought back into effect if warranted, and the nature of the authority to waive or lift sanctions on Iran.

CRS foreign affairs and legal experts also supported a number of global trade issues, including the reauthorization of Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the U.S.-EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP), U.S. trade relations with China, and economic sanctions against Russia.

Finally, CRS provided extensive support for Senate operations. Our analysts and attorneys provided in-depth research, empirical analysis, and procedural expertise on executive and judicial nominations as the Senate exercised its duty to advise and consent. And our legislative procedure experts supported Senate deliberations not only through reports and tailored work but also through an extensive seminar program on all aspects of the legislative process.

Many of these issues will continue to be of interest to Congress this session. We have completed our annual legislative planning process, identifying over 140 issues likely to be on the congressional agenda. To ensure we are prepared to meet congressional needs, we have formed multidisciplinary teams which are preparing and updating reports and organizing our product line and web resources around those issues.

This anticipatory legislative planning process spanned several months and resulted in CRS being well placed to provide products and services to the Congress this session. However, even the best planning cannot anticipate all issues that may suddenly confront the Congress. CRS has the analytical flexibility to quickly address emerging

issues. For example, the terrorist attack on Paris last year turned attention overnight to a number of international and domestic security issues. As events unfolded, we quickly updated our reports on the Islamic State, terrorism, immigration, and domestic security and highlighted that body of work on the home page of our web site. In addition to products focused on those issues, our experts conducted in-person briefings and prepared tailored analyses of questions raised by the attack. CRS staff stand ready to respond to emerging issues like the Paris event at all times.

CONGRESSIONAL SATISFACTION

Given our close working relationship with Congress, CRS has been tasked with leading a Library-wide initiative to survey Members of Congress and their staffs, to ensure that the Library's products and services are meeting expectations. The Library recently entered into a contract with Gallup, which has an 80-year history of conducting cutting-edge survey research. Gallup will conduct Member and staff surveys and interviews to determine their fundamental and optimal requirements for services and support from the Library and especially CRS and what, if any, actions are necessary to provide those services. We expect their final report later this year.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Although CRS's statutory mission remains the same, Congress and the environment in which it operates are rapidly evolving. To ensure that the Service is well positioned to meet the information and research needs of a twenty-first century Congress, we launched a comprehensive strategic planning effort that identified priorities, goals, and objectives that will enable us to move effectively into CRS's second century. One of the first tasks identified is a review of our operations, beginning with an assessment of how we can better manage and utilize the latest technologies. This CRS plan is compatible with the Library's overall strategic plan. CRS has kept its congressional oversight committees informed of the goals as well as progress on the plan. This five-year strategic plan will be implemented beginning in 2016, through 2020.

NEW AUTHORING AND PUBLISHING TOOL

The Service's information technology infrastructure shapes our daily operations, the research we are able to conduct, and how we are able to deliver our products and services to the Congress. CRS made significant progress in fiscal 2015 on a multi-year effort to identify and assess options for updating our existing system for authoring and publishing written products distributed directly to the Congress. A special working group composed of a cross-section of staff from across the Service continues to develop

a detailed set of requirements and technology options for the future of the authoring and publishing system.

PRODUCT ENHANCEMENTS

In order to meet evolving congressional needs, new “In Focus” and “CRS Testimony” products were developed for release on CRS.gov in fiscal 2015. In Focus products are concise, two-sided, one-page summaries of key issues on a given topic. They are available in printable PDF format as well as standard HTML pages. CRS produced approximately 250 In Focus products during the fiscal year. In addition, a template was developed to provide congressional staff with easy access to congressional testimony submitted by CRS experts. Both In Focus and CRS Testimony products can be located on the CRS website by key word or author search, similar to CRS Reports.

To help meet the growing congressional demand for visual information, CRS launched a pilot study of a new product line devoted to stand-alone, high-quality “infographics.” These products present complex information in a condensed visual form that is easily understood. Multiple infographics have been posted on CRS.gov, covering a range of diverse topics such as regulatory burdens on small banks, economic effects of the fiscal 2014 government shutdown, and military casualty statistics. Additional infographics will be developed as we determine the effectiveness and usability of this product type. CRS also collaborated in the Library-wide project to develop a geospatial hosting environment which will allow the creation of interactive maps for congressional use.

CRS continues to explore additional product formats for presenting key information and analysis in ways that meet congressional needs for authoritativeness, accuracy, and brevity. As part of this effort the Service is developing one-page summaries of CRS reports that will be published as stand-alone products. The Service is also developing new Issue Pages for CRS.gov that will provide a one-place stop for products on specific issues, like defense and healthcare. The Issue Pages are intended to align the organization of CRS products to the portfolio structure of congressional offices and make them more easily accessible for congressional staff.

CONGRESS.GOV ENHANCEMENT

Working in collaboration with the Senate, House, GPO, and the broader Library, CRS significantly contributed to the continuing development of Congress.gov as the official source for federal legislative information that will fully meet congressional needs. CRS provided data analysis, subject matter expertise, consultation, system testing, user testing, coordination of data partner relationships, and support for congressional users

and data partners. CRS also continues to support the use of the Congress-only LIS until equivalent capability is fully developed for the new Congress.gov.

CONCLUSION

Congress relies on CRS to marshal interdisciplinary resources, apply critical thinking, and create innovative frameworks to help legislators evaluate and develop sound legislative options and make decisions that will guide and shape present and future national policy. The entire CRS staff is dedicated to that mission and proud of our unique role as extended congressional staff. However, to continue to provide confidential, objective, nonpartisan, authoritative and timely research and analysis, CRS needs to be able to continue to build and enhance its research capacity with staff capable of meeting fully the needs of Congress as you contend with increasingly complex issues.

I appreciate your continued support and look forward to working with you to ensure that CRS continues to robustly fulfill its mission to you and the entire Congress.