

Statement of Mary B. Mazanec
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before the
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Fiscal 2015 Budget Request

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Madam Chair, Senator Hoeven, and Members of the Subcommittee:

It is a pleasure to appear before you today to present the fiscal 2015 budget request for the Congressional Research Service (CRS). In just a few months, CRS will mark its centennial. CRS began modestly with the enactment of the legislative branch appropriations bill on July 16, 1914 providing funds for the Librarian of Congress to employ persons to prepare indexes, digests and compilations of law that may be required for the Congress. Senator Robert LaFollette and Representative John Nelson, borrowing from concepts developed by the Wisconsin legislative reference bureau and the New York State Library, were leaders in the effort to create a reference unit for the Congress within the Library of Congress. Legislative reorganization acts in 1946 and 1970 increased the responsibilities of Congress' legislative support agency that are embodied in today's Congressional Research Service. With this rich history, CRS enters its second century committed to the values of objectivity, non-partisanship and authoritativeness that have always guided its work for the Congress.

Support for Congress

Analysis and Information. CRS analysts and information professionals addressed a wide range of complex and controversial issues in support of Senators and committees this past year.

As the fiscal year ended, CRS assisted lawmakers with information, analyses, and consultations on past government shutdowns; shutdown planning by federal agencies and the process of determining which government activities could continue during a funding lapse. CRS advised the Congress on legislative process questions relating to the enactment of appropriations and examined potential ramifications of a shutdown on congressional operations.

CRS analysts tracked the evolving budgetary landscape over the course of the past year, explaining processes and trends involved with sequestration and the

implementation of the Budget Control Act. Strategic priorities in the fiscal 2014 defense budget were also analyzed and experts assessed long-term trends in defense spending, analyzed military procurement, and provided consultative support on costs associated with various force structure options that could result from the expected reduction in U.S. forces over the next decade.

Following the publication in the United States and Great Britain of information on the collection of data on telephone and internet communications by the National Security Agency, Congress began debating the proper scope of the surveillance authorities provided under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). Senate and House committees sought assistance from CRS. CRS attorneys analyzed the constitutional implications of the disclosed activities and advised on proposed amendments to the FISA. Analysts examined the need to balance the level of intelligence activities with difficult budget choices, the domestic use of intelligence, as well as civil liberty and information security issues. Proposals to introduce more transparency and provide the opportunity to present counter arguments before the FISA court were also analyzed.

CRS also provided analyses of legislative proposals that would modify or repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The implementation of the Act continued throughout the year prompting CRS support on a variety of issues, including legal analyses of enforcement of private health insurance market reforms, contraceptive coverage and the migration of Members and certain congressional staff to the new health care marketplaces.

Experts in Senate procedure and the rules of the Senate provided advice and analysis during the debate on changing the chamber's cloture rules concerning certain executive appointments. Historical data on nominations and Senate consideration of nominees were also developed. The recess appointment power and the role of the Senate in approving executive nominations is now before the Supreme Court, and CRS attorneys and analysts provided analysis and information on that contentious issue.

Immigration reform continued to generate great interest and a variety of legislative approaches. CRS assisted with development of comprehensive immigration reform and border security bills in the Senate. Analysts addressed proposals to increase border security and immigration enforcement, expand verification of employment eligibility and worksite enforcement, revise nonimmigrant visa categories and legal permanent immigration, and legalize some unauthorized aliens currently residing in the United States.

Both the Senate and House considered separate omnibus bills to replace the expiring 2008 farm bill. CRS agricultural specialists provided analysis of various legislative proposals regarding farm commodity support, conservation, trade, rural development, nutrition, credit, energy, livestock, and organic agriculture. Proposals to reduce Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (food stamps) costs were also part of this debate. CRS responded by providing background information on SNAP program rules, as well as analyses of a number of the cost-saving proposals such as restricting SNAP “categorical eligibility” and changing benefit calculation rules for certain recipients of energy aid. CRS provided analysis of the legislation shortly after its enactment in early February.

Congress expressed interest in the impact on energy policy of increased U.S. natural gas supply and the possibility of exporting liquefied natural gas (LNG). The Department of Energy approved permits to export LNG to non-Free Trade Agreement countries, with dozens of other applications pending. LNG exports were the subject of a CRS seminar in March. Throughout the year CRS analysts responded to numerous requests for memoranda, briefings, and consultations on LNG.

CRS experts addressed numerous country-specific and regionally focused issues posed by the continuing turmoil in the Middle East. Analysts assisted the Congress as it dealt with civil war in Syria and whether and how the United States should intervene in that conflict, particularly following the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime. The Congress looked to the Service for information and analysis on the nature and size of Syria’s chemical weapons stockpile and delivery capabilities as well as the implications of Syria joining the Chemical Weapons Convention. Congress sought legal assistance regarding the potential use of force by the United States against Syria in response to chemical attacks on Syrian civilians. CRS responded by providing briefings and analysis on declarations of war and authorizations for the use of force, as well as congressional authority to limit military operations. CRS also analyzed the agreement that was entered into to dispose of Syria’s chemical weapon stockpile. CRS offered ongoing support following Mohammed Morsi’s overthrow in Egypt and the increasing unrest and polarization between government forces and Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers, including analysis of U.S. aid to Egypt and future political, economic, and security ties. During diplomatic efforts surrounding Iran’s nuclear program and the short-term agreement entered into by the parties, CRS advised on the technical aspects of Iran sanctions laws, analyzed how those laws were implemented and what effects they had on Iran’s economy, as well as providing ongoing analysis of the Iranian political arena, foreign policy, and nuclear programs.

Technology Initiatives. CRS contributed to continuing development and daily operations of the next generation legislative information system platform and services

(beta.congress.gov). This work – performed by a multidepartment team in the Library – is a significant component of a Library-wide strategic initiative that will replace two legacy legislative information systems (LIS and THOMAS) with a single, modern system. CRS provided data analysis, subject matter expertise consultation, system testing, user testing, coordination of data partner relationships, and support for congressional users.

Several enhancements to the CRS web site (CRS.gov) occurred during the past year. The search experience was improved, with full-text search, enhanced ability to filter search results by topic, author, date, content type “facets,” and a feature that displays search results in a manner that facilitates client contact with relevant analysts, attorneys, and information professionals. CRS also modified its web site layout in light of the proliferation of mobile devices on Capitol Hill in order to adapt to the smaller mobile device screens, and added improvements to support touch-screen users who cannot effectively execute desktop-specific commands.

CRS also introduced streaming videos to the CRS web site in addition to its menu of seminar DVDs. At the end of the fiscal year, 10 streaming videos were available to the Congress on topics including immigration reform, border security, natural hazards and disasters, financial challenges to the U.S. Postal Service, major cases from the recent Supreme Court term, and the fiscal year 2014 defense budget. This year, CRS will augment its video presence and also include on-demand videos of popular CRS policy seminars.

CRS Policy Insights, a new product type modeled on the CRS Legal Sidebar, is being introduced in response to client feedback for shorter, succinct products that are published quickly to address fast-moving public policy issues. This product line is expected to appear in early spring. A two page “In Focus” product line is also under development. These short briefing documents are designed for Members and staff who need abbreviated analysis about current policy issues facing the Congress.

We are also refreshing the home page of the CRS web site to modernize its look and feel and facilitate user access to products and services. Many of the new products will be highlighted and users should find the site easier to navigate. Following on web layout improvements that we made last year, the home page refresh will also aid mobile users of the web site. The changes in our product line and the web site updates are part of our continuing efforts to provide a menu of products and services that are responsive to client needs and the demands of the legislative process.

Budget Opportunities

We appreciate the opportunity that the increased fiscal 2014 funding gave us to begin to fill some critical gaps in our analytical and information professional ranks. The fiscal 2015 budget request of \$108,382,000 only includes increases for mandatory pay and price level changes.

In addition to postings for analysts and information professionals, we have begun recruiting a cadre of research assistants to support analysts and facilitate their analytical work. This pool of researchers will enable analysts to focus on higher level analysis. The skill sets being sought in these research positions will also contribute to a broader mix of products and services available to congressional staff. CRS is continuing to explore the composition of its workforce to achieve efficiencies and best serve client demand.

The increased funding also enabled us to devote resources to technology projects that we had deferred. Two systems critical to our work for the Congress – our authoring and publishing application and our systems which intake and manage congressional requests – need to be modernized. We will likely utilize both in-house and contracted expertise to achieve these objectives.

CRS Anniversary Planning

Planning for commemorating the centennial of CRS in 2014 continues. Among the planned events are a conference highlighting the Congress and the challenges of governance in a global era, a centennial publication highlighting CRS history, and a Library exhibition featuring objects marking milestones in CRS development throughout the century. The centennial events center around the 100th anniversary of the enactment of the legislation that provided for the creation of CRS on July 16, 2014. The symposium and evening reception are being co-sponsored with CRS by the Former Members Association and are funded through privately raised individual and foundation support.

Centennial Edition of the Constitution Annotated

CRS partnered with other Library units, including the Law Library of Congress, and the Government Printing Office (GPO) to publish the centennial edition of *The Constitution of the United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation*, (known as *The Constitution Annotated* and as *CONAN*) on Constitution Day, September 17, 2013. The document was produced in both print and digital formats (managed by GPO), and as a free Apple iStore application (managed by the Library of Congress). An Android application is forthcoming. A seminar on educating the public on the Constitution to

which Supreme Court Justices have been invited is scheduled for September as part of the events surrounding the centennial of CRS.

Conclusion

This centenary year is an opportunity to both observe this important occasion in the history of the Congressional Research Service and to confirm our commitment to the importance of authoritative and objective research and analysis to the work of the Congress. We appreciate the consistent support of the committee over the years and look forward to continuing to be the Congress' most trusted source for the information and analysis that is necessary for an informed national legislature.