

Statement of Nancy Erickson, Secretary of the Senate

Before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch

March 25, 2014

Chairman Shaheen, Senator Hoeven, Members of the Subcommittee, this past fiscal year has presented many challenges for the offices within the purview of the Secretary of the Senate. From the Disbursing Office that developed a new payroll system, implemented a new health care law under a very tight schedule, and ensured timely paychecks when the government reopened, to our legislative clerks and the legislative support staff who worked around the clock for 48 plus hours to support the Senate Floor, all of the Secretary's staff are a credit to this institution, and I continue to admire their grace and resiliency.

It is with pride in the work of our staff and our historic role in providing legislative, financial and administrative support to the Senate since 1789 that I present testimony on behalf of the Office of the Secretary of the Senate.

I am requesting a Fiscal Year 2015 budget of \$31,169,000. The request includes \$24,919,000 for salaries, which reflects a potential \$395,000 increase for a cost-of-living adjustment for our employees. The remainder of the budget request, \$1,900,000 for operating expenses for our legislative, financial and administrative departments and \$4,350,000 to fund the research and news services provided to the Senate community through the Senate Information Services (SIS) program, would hold outlays to current FY14 levels.

My testimony is a snapshot of the work carried out by the professional staff within the 26 departments in the Office of the Secretary, and I ask that my written statement and our department reports be submitted to the record.

During sequestration, our Senate Librarian worked with vendors to continue providing online research services to Senate offices at reduced rates. Funding limitations reduced access to one research service, a change that generated numerous complaints from our Senate clients. We were pleased that the FY14 appropriation allowed us to restore full access. Notably, the FY14 appropriation was the first increase for the SIS program since our office assumed responsibility for the program in 2011. SIS funding should be protected by a fiscal firewall to ensure transparency.

With the launch of the new payroll system, our Disbursing office staff members are turning their attention to the eventual replacement of the Financial Management Information System (FMIS), the core accounting system that supports all Senate offices. Staff has started gathering requirements for a new system, as well as drafting a business plan that will be shared with the committee for possible phased implementation over the next several years.

Meeting the January 2014 statutory deadline, the Office of Public Records (OPR), partnering with the Sergeant at Arms (SAA) and the Senate Ethics Committee, launched an electronic filing system for Members and staff to file financial disclosure reports due in May, as well as periodic transaction reports. OPR also received over 113,500 electronically filed lobbying registrations and reports and copied, scanned, indexed and transmitted 4,882 campaign reports, containing over 490,000 pages, up 110,000 from the previous year, to the FEC within the 48 hours required by law.

Our Office takes seriously its many education responsibilities, and in a cost-effective manner, substantively increased training webinars provided to Senate offices' state-based staff by our Senate Library and our Senate Chief Counsel for Employment. Library training class attendance was up four percent this year, despite the fact that many classes were cancelled during the government shutdown. Senate history also became more social with the debut of a Twitter account, expanding the audience for marking Senate events and milestones. The daily tweets help raise awareness of the considerable resources available on Senate.gov to students, teachers, researchers, reporters and the public. There are roughly 36,500 daily visits to Senate.gov, which is managed by our Office of Web Technology.

One hundred and fifty five years ago, the Senate moved into its current chamber. The office of Senate Curator has launched a program to improve the preservation of the Senate Chamber desks, which include 48 of the mahogany desks made by Thomas Constantine after the Old Senate Chamber was destroyed by fire in 1814, as well as other historic furnishings in the Senate's public and ceremonial spaces.

Speaking of history, the Stationery Room has identified a way to achieve possible cost savings by amending an 1815 law that requires the procurement of stationery products through sealed bids from one or more newspaper advertisements. Advertising on FedBizOpps.gov and using the GSA Schedule could increase competition and lower some stationery product costs for our customers. The Stationery Room also increased efficiency and reduced costs by posting monthly account statements on TranSAAct, the online business services portal used by Senate offices.

January 22nd of this year marked the 10th anniversary of the introduction of the first Senate bill composed using LEXA. LEXA is a system used by the Senate's Legislative Counsel and committees, like Appropriations, to author, print, display and share legislative documents with Senate and House legislative clerks, the Government Printing Office and the Library of Congress. LEXA has proven to be an example of a highly successful government IT program, and the Senate is fortunate to rely on our small and very smart Legislative Information System (LIS) office to provide the technical expertise that built and supports the system.

I'm proud of another small legislative office, its staff members rarely seen on the Senate Floor. For 20 years, our Office of Captioning Services has provided real-time captioning of legislative proceedings for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. The office has achieved an impressive accuracy

level of 99 percent. This year, they will launch new digital captioning software that will be more user-friendly for staff that relies on the real-time closed-caption log.

Finally, given the reality that an updated Riddick's publication could be years away, our Parliamentarian staff, with the help of our Web Technology staff, are developing an online precedents database. While it will be a continuous work in progress, tackling thousands of precedents, I'm confident it will be a valuable supplement to Riddick's for Members and staff.

Our Office has said farewell to several colleagues who retired after long careers with the Office of the Secretary. We are grateful for their hard work, high standards of excellence and mentoring of staff. We are a better organization because of their contributions, and we look forward to another year of serving this great institution.