

Statement of Mary B. Mazanec
Director, Congressional Research Service
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Fiscal 2016 Budget Request
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Madame Chairman, Senator Schatz and Members of the Subcommittee:

As CRS begins its second century of service to Congress, it is a pleasure to appear before you today to present our Fiscal Year 2016 budget request. 2014 – our centennial year – was a time of celebration, reflection, and activities that drew our staff together. We also engaged present and former Members in discussions concerning CRS, the evolution of the institution and its support for the Congress, and what the future may hold for both the Service and Congress.

I hope you have had the opportunity to read the history we prepared of CRS's first one hundred years, "CRS at 100: Informing the Legislative Debate Since 1914". It not only highlights the accomplishments of CRS in support of the Congress but also shows the breadth and depth of expertise embodied in our staff and their commitment to our mission of helping provide for a more informed legislature.

We are also very proud of another special centennial publication, the Senate Rules Committee Print, "The Evolving Congress", which features a series of essays analyzing important trends in the evolution of congressional organization and policy making over the last many decades. Next month, with support from the Hewlett Foundation, we are continuing that important discussion at a special event with E.J. Dionne, Michael Gerson, and Frances Lee. I hope you will be able to join us for what should be a fascinating evening delving into the history of Congress and its future development.

Last year also marked the 100th anniversary of the Constitution of the United States of America Annotated, which we celebrated with a day-long program in September. Popularly known as CONAN, this Senate Document is prepared by attorneys in the CRS American Law Division and tracks the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court of the United States. The program brought together prominent legal scholars and commentators and included a dialogue about the Supreme Court with Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

It was truly an honor to serve as the Director of CRS during this important milestone in our history.

Support for Congress

While we celebrated our centennial, CRS also provided research and analysis, expert consultation, and an enhanced web presence to support the full spectrum of congressional policy deliberations. In the last year, CRS experts worked with every Member office and congressional committee to help you and your staffs navigate the wide range of complex and controversial issues that confronted Congress. We answered over 61,000 individual requests; had over 7,500 people attend CRS seminars, trainings, and briefings; and provided more than 3,500 new or refreshed CRS reports and other products. CRS.gov is now the repository for nearly 10,000 reports and other information that is accessible at all times.

Two high-profile issues that were addressed by the 113th Congress help illustrate both the depth and flexibility of CRS work for Congress:

The 2014 Farm Bill is a good case study of how the Service assists in the regular, deliberative process of reauthorizing major, complex legislative programs. From the very start of deliberations to replace the expiring 2008 Farm Bill, CRS food and agriculture policy analysts provided in-depth analysis of various legislative proposals across a broad spectrum of policy areas that included farm commodity support, conservation, trade, rural development, nutrition, credit, bio-energy, livestock, horticulture, and research.

Authorizing committees, individual Members, and congressional staff called on CRS to explain the intricacies of current farm and food policy and to help identify and analyze policy options for revamping the federal farm safety net. As the legislation moved forward, CRS experts continued to provide individualized support, including preparing committee staff for legislative markup, analyzing proposed committee and floor amendments, briefing individual Members and their senior policy staff, and evaluating a slate of legislative options.

As a group, CRS analysts conducted several well-attended seminars for congressional staff on the various farm bill titles, with consideration of how farm bill spending is affected by pressures for deficit reduction. These seminars were so popular that CRS needed to schedule additional sessions to accommodate interested congressional staff.

With many provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill expiring before the new legislation could be finalized, CRS also fielded many questions about the effects on issues of

concern for Members' districts. CRS staff responded with authoritative reports and tailored briefings to help Members manage the evolving situation.

The overall support to Congress was a testament to the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary policy deliberations, as agriculture and budget analysts at CRS collaborated with attorneys to provide comprehensive coverage of the issues.

Of course, CRS support did not end with enactment of the legislation. After passage, Congress shifted to their oversight role, closely monitoring the Department of Agriculture's implementation of the new law. CRS analysts continue to play an integral role in the oversight process, responding to numerous requests on the implications of the new farm bill, and have conducted a number of "Agriculture 101" briefings for Member offices and committee staff about the law. In addition to multiple informative reports on the farm bill, CRS developed a side-by-side analysis of the new law compared to its predecessor and the Senate and House bills.

The Ebola Virus Outbreak highlights the flexibility of the Service to provide in-depth research and analysis for the unanticipated, fast-breaking global challenges that can suddenly find their way onto the legislative agenda.

Last summer, reports of the rapidly spreading Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) raised serious concerns among U.S. and international government officials and lawmakers. At one point in early August, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that there could be over one million cases of EVD globally by 2015 if the rate of transmission was not dramatically curbed. Those concerns, which became heightened and accelerated once the first U.S. case was reported, triggered a large number of inquiries from congressional offices, along with hearings on the public health, legal, and international implications of the disease, as well as the U.S. government response to the crisis.

The CRS response to this public health crisis was swift, thoughtful, multi-disciplinary, authoritative, and timely. CRS analysts from across the Service supported ongoing congressional hearings and investigations into the response to EVD. To provide a broad spectrum of information, CRS experts from multiple divisions used the full range of CRS products – from traditional reports to newer short-form documents, including Insights, Legal Sidebars, and FAQs – to examine the crisis from a variety of perspectives, including public health, legal, international health and relations, transportation and commerce, immigration, homeland security, and clinical research and product development.

Analysts also conducted in-person briefings and hosted a “Question and Answer” event that was made available to all Members and staff in person and through video on the CRS website.

By having deep in-house expertise on a wide range of issues, and the ability for CRS experts to work collaboratively, the Service was able to quickly develop the information Congress needed on EVD. That in turn helped Members and their staff develop appropriate courses of action to respond to a rapidly changing situation with broad health and national security implications for the country.

Other Legislative Topics: While the Farm Bill and the Ebola outbreak provide a snapshot of how CRS works, over the last year, CRS provided similar support on the entire range of issues before Congress.

CRS analyzed multiple economic, financial, and budget issues, including tax reform, oversight of the implementation of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, the Export-Import Bank reauthorization, and Bitcoin, just to name a few. Experts also helped congressional offices understand the impact of the government shutdown and tracked and analyzed the FY2015 budget request and appropriations process throughout the year. Congress looked to CRS for support on many complex domestic issues, including unaccompanied immigrant children, veterans’ health, human trafficking, child welfare, violence against women, and sexual assault in the military. CRS experts also supported the congressional debate on the Keystone XL pipeline, hydraulic fracturing, re-authorization of federal highway and public transportation programs, and cybersecurity.

On the foreign affairs front, CRS staff analyzed policy options to address the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and the Ukraine; and relations with Russia, North Korea, and China. In addition, CRS supported the Congress on pending international free trade agreements and monitored the negotiations of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the U.S.-EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

CRS also presented a symposium on Senate rules changes last year. CRS experts, a former parliamentarian, and past Secretaries of the Senate discussed the impact of these changes with senior Senate staff in attendance. The program was followed by numerous briefings and seminars tailored to Member and staff needs.

Budget Considerations

Over the last year, the Service has been able to fill some critical gaps in our analytical and information professional ranks. We also hired research assistants to support analysts and contribute to a broader mix of products and services and we

continue to improve the CRS website and technical capabilities. With the additional staff, we have replaced about one-third of the decreases in personnel that occurred over the past few years due to budget reductions. While we are thinner than we would like in some areas, we are constantly monitoring our staffing across the service to ensure that we have the skill sets and expertise needed to support Congress.

The CRS fiscal 2016 budget request is \$111,956,000 to fund mandatory pay and price level changes as well as a program increase to enhance research capacity on health care policy.

Health Experts. The budget request includes a program increase of \$1,087,000 and six FTEs to add six health policy analyst/attorney positions and \$250,000 of contractor technical and programming support for large health data systems. This increased analytical capacity is needed to meet the high client demand and fully support the work of Congress on health care issues. As the health care industry is becoming increasingly complex, additional expertise is needed to analyze for Congress recent changes in the financing of health insurance and the delivery of health care services. Extra analytical support is also needed to support Congress as it confronts emerging issues under Medicare, Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, and employer-based and private health insurance. In addition, the regulatory framework has become more complex, and provision of health care to veterans has come under recent scrutiny. That increase in demand and complexity is putting real pressure on CRS health experts, some of whom are shouldering two to three times the average number of requests as other CRS staff. The six requested staff positions would help relieve that pressure and add expertise in evaluating health industry trends and availability, tax and legal issues, veterans' care, and data evaluation.

Workforce Initiatives. We are continuing to examine the composition of our workforce to ensure that we have the right mix of skill sets and expertise to best serve the Congress. Last year, we hired 11 research assistants to assist analysts and diversify areas of specialization. We also increased our editorial capacity to support authors in the preparation of products for Congress and have expanded our graphics capabilities to enhance the visual presentation of CRS research and analysis. Our information professionals utilize digital librarianship skills, and recent hires have reflected changes made to these positions. We plan to critically assess these initiatives to determine how these positions and skill sets best fit into the organization and what other modifications to our workforce may be needed.

Product and Service Enhancements. CRS continues to seek new and innovative ways to deliver information and analysis to Congress. In fiscal 2014, CRS increased the diversity of its product line by establishing a new product type, the CRS Insight, a short,

web-only product designed to present timely information, research, data, and analysis in an easily accessible format. Along with the earlier launched Legal Sidebar, the Insight responds to client demand for succinct products that are published quickly in response to fast-moving public policy issues.

CRS is participating in a Library-wide project to develop a geospatial infrastructure that will enable the Service to offer interactive maps to Congress. The goal is to make available to Congress fully interactive maps that allow clients to view details of interest and toggle data layers to visualize the resulting differences. We have a small team of geographic information system (GIS) analysts and information professionals that provide GIS services to congressional clients. GIS uses visualization for the focused analysis of complex concepts.

CRS established an infographics working group in 2014 to consider methods to improve delivery of image-based content in our written products and on our web site. The use of this content to convey information and analysis is widely recognized as an effective form of communication. Although image-based content (e.g., tables, graphs, maps) produced by CRS is typically embedded into written products, users of CRS products could benefit from the creation of a new product line devoted to stand-alone, high-quality “infographics,” which present complex information in a condensed visual form that may be easily understood without the need for an accompanying written product. A pilot study has begun with the goal of displaying infographics products on CRS.gov this year.

CRS enhanced its website home page last year with a modern appearance with more space for content and for expanding product lines. The home page is also stylized to the modern user’s preference for mobile access. Other new features of the website include graphic images to accompany highlighted reports and icons to help the user distinguish the different types of products. A video carousel at the foot of the home page highlights CRS videos, and a similar display on issue pages highlights CRS experts who have authored products on selected issues and who are available for consultation.

As part of the Library’s multi-departmental team, CRS contributed to continuing development and daily operations of the next generation legislative information system platform and services. Congress.gov will replace two legacy legislative information systems (LIS and THOMAS) with a single, modern one. 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. Since late September, 2014, Congress.gov has been the official website for U.S. federal legislative information.

Conclusion

As CRS begins its second century, we remain committed to our core values and mission: providing comprehensive, authoritative, objective, timely and nonpartisan research and analysis on all legislative, oversight, and representational issues of interest to Congress.

The entire CRS staff works hard every day to ensure that you, your staffs, and committees have the information, analysis, and support you need as you do your jobs.

We are very proud of the work we do. But we know we could not have achieved all we have in our first 100 years without this committee's support. I appreciate your continued support and look forward to working with you to ensure that CRS is a state-of-the-art research service responsive to the information and analytical needs of the 21st century Congress.