

**Testimony of Daniel Schuman**  
**Demand Progress Policy Director**  
**before the Senate Appropriations Committee**  
**Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch for FY 2021**  
**Concerning the Secretary of the Senate**  
**April 30, 2020**

Chairman Hyde-Smith, Ranking Member Murphy, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Daniel Schuman and I lead Demand Progress's Congressional capacity team, which conducts research and engages in advocacy focused on strengthening Congress.<sup>1</sup> We greatly appreciate this Subcommittee's ongoing work to modernize Congress, exemplified by the study on congressional staff pay, the expansion of the Senate Employees' Child Care Center, and the creation of an e-Signature platform.

My testimony focuses on modernizing congressional technology. Modernization encompasses moving to digital platforms that augment the current paper-based processes, facilitating the use of congressional data across the legislative branch and beyond, and increasing the resiliency of congressional operations in emergencies.

The importance of resilient and flexible information technology infrastructure could not be more apparent than it is today in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of Congress, their personal and committee staff, and staff in congressional offices and support agencies all must be able to perform their duties regardless of the circumstances. Technology, when designed properly and fully integrated into legislative operations, provides important capabilities that support the work of Congress even in the most adverse circumstances.

The Senate and House have undertaken significant efforts to improve the quality of information technology available to the legislative branch. We believe that further development of technology tools — including the build-out of platforms and systems to share and manage data — requires the instantiation of an even closer level of coordination among the many components of the legislative branch than exists today.

There is no entity inside Congress with the singular, day-to-day focus on improving how information is managed and shared throughout the legislative branch. Consequently, it is not always clear what data exists, where it can be found, who is responsible for it, and

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, visit <https://firstbranchforecast.com/>

whether that data is being employed for all the purposes for which it is fit. In addition, multiple technologies are at times being used by different offices to manage the exact same information, which results in additional costs from the procurement of duplicative tools and inefficiencies from transferring data between incompatible formats. Furthermore, many traditional (often paper-based) legislative practices would be greatly enhanced if they were supported by interoperable digital platforms.

For example, legislative branch-wide digital platforms could support—

- Improved handling of the introduction, co-sponsoring, and amending of legislation, including tracking that legislation, providing comparative prints thereof, and reformatting it for publication as slip laws as well as codification into the U.S. Code;
- Digitizing committee meeting notices, documents, testimony, transcripts, voting tallies, nominations information, and archives; deconflicting the scheduling of legislative proceedings; and so on;
- More expeditious handling of executive branch communications;
- Improving constituent relations management through enhanced tracking of inquiries, responses, and communications to agencies, the use of an e-signature platform to improve response times, and better methods for mass communications that are customizable to constituent interests;
- Better techniques for managing offices, including payroll, leave tracking, hiring and firing, and overseeing staff benefits; and
- Managing ethics information, including submission, review, approval, and publication of staff and member financial disclosures, gifts, travel reports, and statements of outside business; lobbyist registrations; post-employment restrictions; etc.;
- Matters relating to cybersecurity, strengthening district offices ability to work collaboratively with the DC office, historical records, agency documents, and support for mobile technology that improves resiliency in the face of emergencies as well as flexibility in day-to-day activities.

**We recommend the creation of a Legislative Branch Information Technology Coordination Office**, co-directed by a Senate Data Coordination Officer and a House Data Coordination Officer, as a pilot project. The Office would coordinate and support legislative branch information technologies that augment traditional legislative processes and practices.

Specifically, as a start, the Legislative Branch Information Technology Coordination Office would:

- ***Serve as a forum for convening relevant stakeholders*** to facilitate strategy coordination, procurement, knowledge-sharing; consultation with internal and external experts; and act as a clearinghouse for appropriately routing technical inquiries, issues, and ideas;
- ***Facilitate information sharing across different components in the legislative branch*** by bringing together key players and encouraging their collaborative identification, development, and adoption of best practices and techniques;
- ***Promote interoperability and efficiency*** by encouraging the sequencing of the development of tools and adoption of technologies across legislative branch components; and
- ***Facilitate legislative operations*** by investigating and identifying areas worth investment and surfacing gaps in current processes and possible points of failure.

The Senate and House Data Coordination Officers would be chosen respectively by the Senate Sergeant at Arms and the House Clerk. This provides equitable representation to each chamber's nonpartisan legislative operations staff and would serve as an extension of pre-existing, informal practices. Part of the office's role would be to provide a forum to invite relevant staff from legislative support offices and agencies to participate in the co-development of shared approaches to address common issues.

In addition to the above duties, the Legislative Branch Information Technology Coordination Office would be responsible for supporting the efforts of the Bulk Data Task Force; tracking datasets released by the legislative branch; providing advice, guidance, and encouragement to offices regarding the publication of legislative branch information as data; supporting the annual Legislative Data and Transparency

Conference; and supporting and providing assistance to the public with finding and obtaining legislative data.

The creation of a visible point of contact with a focus on the institution as a whole would serve as a rallying point for modernization efforts while allowing each component to continue to focus on advancing its particularized mission. In addition, it is a pragmatic outgrowth of the many *ad hoc* coordination efforts that exist today. Such an office could be small, with one administrative FTE to support two full-time Coordination Officers.

The Legislative Branch would benefit from improved coordination on the development of digital processes that facilitate traditional legislative operations and practices. Congress must continue to work to adapt its technology to modern circumstances in an increasingly mobile and volatile world. We look forward to continuing the conversation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony.