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before the
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Fiscal 2012 Budget Request
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Mr. Chairman, Mr. Honda, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the fiscal year 2012 budget request for the Congressional Research Service (CRS). This will be my final testimony before the subcommittee. After 17 years as Director and 42 years with the Congressional Research Service, I am retiring from congressional service in April. It has been an honor and privilege to have served in a variety of capacities in CRS, an organization that I believe is critical to maintaining an informed national legislature. It is also one that is uniquely positioned to serve Congress in these times of budget constraints.

CRS: Pooled Staff for Congress

CRS has always prided itself as an extension of congressional staff, a pooled resource that is available to all of Congress. The range of its expertise and the disciplines that make up the Service's informational and analytical capacity were intended to relieve Member and committee offices of the need to hire specialized expertise to cover the many issues they confront on a daily basis. This was one of the central reasons for Congress' enhancement of CRS in the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970.

In that act, among other important institutional changes, Congress increased CRS' permanent staff and the Congressional Research Service was reconstituted from the Legislative Reference Service and established as a cost-effective shared resource available to every Member regardless of seniority, party or position, and to every committee. The House Committee on Rules Report on the 1970 Act emphasized the importance of having such a nonpartisan resource accessible to all Members when it wrote that a shared staff would:

> Insure the equal availability of information to both Houses of Congress; insulate the analytical phase of program review and policy analysis from political biases and therefore produce a more credible and objective product and more easily develop common frames of reference and analytical techniques that would make such analyses more useful and meaningful to all committees.

The Rules Committee went on to stress the efficiency of such a shared research staff:

> Finally, the pooling principle underlying supplementary staffs makes them inherently more economical and efficient than dispersed staffs, for they can more easily reallocate resources as changing conditions and congressional needs warrant.

The Committee's reference to CRS' ability to "develop common frames of reference and analytical techniques that would make such analyses more useful and meaningful to all committees" points to an important hallmark of CRS' work, namely its experts' familiarity with how issues are positioned in the legislative context, their knowledge of how Congress and the law work and their insights into the decision making processes of the executive agencies that implement the law. This, combined with institutional memory developed over years of working with Members and committees, make for a potent unique resource that I would argue Congress can get nowhere else.

As we enter a time of budgetary constraints, I think it is especially important that Congress appreciate that we are its shared staff, complementing its personal and committee staff, providing cost-effective expertise whenever and wherever needed.

We, of course, are prepared to do our part to achieve savings and contribute to the goal of efficient legislative branch operations. I feel that our request for additional staff in certain specialized areas is consistent with the vision of a CRS that efficiently serves all of Congress. It is staff that can be shared with all Members and committees.

We also plan to leverage web tools and client and management information systems to enable more focused and responsive support in the face of budget pressures. In difficult budget times, CRS offers a model that achieves economies and savings and at the same time provides the expertise and resources to Congress to legislate in an informed manner and to effectively oversee the operations of government.

Support for Congress

Highlights of the last session of Congress and CRS' preparations for the 112th Congress illustrate how CRS can bring to bear the breadth and depth of its expertise to provide continuing legislative assistance to Members and committees.

Before the post-election session of the 111th Congress ended, CRS was planning for the 112th by identifying the issues that were likely to be on the legislative agenda, forming multidisciplinary teams around these current legislative issues, preparing and updating reports and positioning itself to help Members and committees more clearly understand the problems facing them and the country and identify and analyze options for dealing with them. We cluster this work around a Current Legislative Issues framework which is an organizing principle for our collaborative work across the Service and a primary means by which we present this work on our web site.

Over 160 issues were identified and, shortly after the 112th Congress convened, we had populated our web site with relevant products and prepared overview issue statements for each of the issues. That array of analysis and information provides all Members access to the best thinking of CRS analysts and information professionals on the issues that are currently or likely to appear on the legislative agenda. The analysis and information are available to all. But just as important, if not more so, this body of work enables direct access to our experts, whose names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses appear on all of our reports. These experts stand ready to consult with Members and congressional staff, prepare tailored analyses of specific questions, and to regularly update their reports to reflect where issues are currently positioned in the legislative process.

This anticipatory legislative planning work spanned several months and resulted in CRS being well placed to provide products and services to the incoming 112th Congress. However, as we all know, even the best planning cannot anticipate all issues that may suddenly confront Congress. CRS has the analytical flexibility to address quickly emerging issues. For example, the ousting of the president of Tunisia quickly fanned unrest in Egypt and other countries in the Middle East. As pressure mounted on President Mubarak to leave office, we quickly updated our reports on Egypt and other countries such as Bahrain, Yemen and Libya that were experiencing popular uprisings and highlighted that body of work on the home page of our web site. We also reorganized our Current Legislative Issues framework for the Middle East to focus on the unrest that was engulfing the region. In addition to products focused on specific countries, analyses also treated the impact of the unrest on oil supplies and the security posture of the United States. And, of course, our Middle East experts conducted numerous briefings and prepared tailored analyses of questions raised by the turmoil.

This confluence of our regular legislative planning work and the mobilization of our expertise in response to breaking events demonstrates how CRS can pool its resources and stand ready to serve the long and short-term needs of Congress. These first few months of the 112th Congress have underscored the contributions CRS can make to the policy debates in Congress. CRS places the array of issues that the Congress is likely to face in a framework that is accessible and that discusses those issues in the legislative context in which they will be debated. And the Service can respond quickly to events that can overtake the legislative agenda and demand the attention of Congress and the country with focused analyses and ready availability of experts from all disciplines.

I must also note another important aspect of our support of the Congress – our congressional operations work. We maintain a large body of reports and information on the procedures and operations of Congress and these will soon be better integrated into our web site offerings to make them more accessible. Our expertise on congressional procedure is unparalleled and we make that expertise available not only through reports and tailored work by legislative procedure analysts but also through an extensive education program of seminars on all aspects of the legislative process. This expertise was on display during the new Members program in January in Williamsburg through

seminars on legislative procedure and the budget process and remains available to all Members.

The 112th Congress saw a number of rules changes in the House, including the requirement that all bills be accompanied by a statement of constitutional authority. The day the rule was approved, CRS placed on the home page of its web site links to several reports designed to assist Members in preparing these constitutional authority statements. Both the House Rules Committee and House Legislative Counsel cited this material as a resource for Members about to introduce bills. Links to these authority statements have also been added to the Legislative Information System. Much like its response to unrest in the Middle East, CRS mobilized its expertise to support Congress (in this case the House) with analysis and information on a change in the legislative environment that impacted all House Members.

A number of high-profile events in the last session of the 111th Congress also demonstrate the breadth and depth of the support CRS provides to the Congress.

When the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded and sank in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010, CRS developed timely research and analytical support at every stage of the legislative process, including numerous hearings and development of legislative proposals. We also posted new research resources on our Web site with links to news, relevant legislation, hearings in both chambers, and an oil spill events time line. CRS specialists – with economic, scientific and legal expertise - provided expert witnesses at hearings and collaborated with lawmakers on many aspects of federal jurisdiction over Outer Continental Shelf resources, fisheries, worker safety, emergency response, insurance, and - after the well was capped - the use of moneys from the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund for the federal spill response and implications of the deepwater drilling moratorium.

2010 also saw enactment of major financial regulatory and health care legislation. With respect to the latter, CRS supported Congress throughout the legislative process, including detailed analyses of proposals and numerous briefings and programs. CRS experts addressed such complex issues as the implications of changes in dependency coverage, establishment of state high-risk pools for individuals with pre-existing health conditions, the creation of small business health insurance tax credits, and also explored legal and policy issues associated with mandating that individuals purchase health insurance. After passage of the law, CRS prepared analyses of the numerous new entities created by the law as well as the steps needed to be taken in the rule-making process. Our attorneys have also tracked the continuing litigation over the validity of the law and analyzed the court decisions as they have been issued.

With respect to the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, lawmakers relied on CRS testimony, numerous reports and memoranda, personal consultations, programs and authoritative comparisons of legislative provisions contained in the House and Senate versions of the legislation. Our experts also supported congressional committees in overseeing the $700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program

LMI found a high degree of satisfaction with CRS products and services and found us to be a reliable, timely and authoritative source of expertise for the entire range of congressional clients. We are addressing areas in which LMI recommended improvements based on the feedback it obtained, including examining our product line, improving our web site and exploring options to ensure that CRS availability is aligned with the operations of congressional staff. Again, it was gratifying to receive the endorsement that we are doing a good job of serving the Congress but there is always room for improvement and these challenging budget times make it all the more imperative that we strive to become the most efficient and cost-effective resource for the Congress that we can be.

Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request

The CRS budget request for fiscal year 2012 is $117.1 million, with almost 90 percent devoted to pay and benefits for our staff. CRS continues to operate at its lowest staff level in more than three decades, and the small percentage of non-pay expenditures is limited to basic operational needs. The requested program increase will obtain additional specialized technical skills and policy expertise to expand the capabilities of the Service and meet the growing policy demands placed upon Congress.

An internal review of our capabilities to analyze the evolving and increasingly complex challenges facing the Congress identified gaps in the specialized skills needed for comprehensive multidisciplinary analyses and assessments. This budget request includes $2.7 million for 17 FTEs needed to address these concerns. This will strengthen research capabilities in science, engineering and technology and the broader expertise in these areas will enable CRS to respond more readily to rapidly changing science and technology policy debates. The economic crisis and the major financial regulatory legislation enacted in its aftermath require additional CRS expertise in financial accounting, consumer protection and financial sector regulation in order to effectively support Congress' legislative and oversight work in these areas. Additional expertise is also needed to support multidisciplinary research on policy options in the wake of the enactment of health care reform legislation as well as analysis of the potential effects of proposed changes in the organization, financing and delivery of health care services. Finally, CRS is asking for additional positions to address the many complex issues pertaining to employment, immigration, the workforce and the economic well-being of U.S. residents.

Conclusion

This budget request identifies resources needed for CRS to provide the full scope of information and analysis that is relevant to the work of every Member and committee of Congress. My colleagues and I have and will continue to examine every activity and program for efficiencies and reduce or eliminate costs where possible while fulfilling our mission. We are proud of our unique role as shared congressional staff in providing comprehensive, non-partisan, confidential, authoritative, and objective research and analysis to the Congress, and we thank you for your support.