



OFFICE OF THE CLERK
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

THE HONORABLE KAREN L. HAAS
CLERK OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**STATEMENT BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH
ON THE OFFICE OF THE CLERK, FY2017**

MARCH 2, 2016

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the operations of the Office of the Clerk. As you know, the Clerk's Office supports the core legislative operations of the House of Representatives and its committees. From the introduction of new bills on the House Floor to the presentment of enrolled bills to the White House for signature by the President, our office is integral to the legislative process. The Clerk's Office ensures the integrity of the legislative process while making technological progress to improve the transparency and availability of the legislative operations for Members, staff, and the public.

HOUSE LEGISLATIVE OPERATIONS: SUPPORT, ACCESSIBILITY, AND TRANSPARENCY

The Office of the Clerk plays a central role in the legislative activities of the House. Clerk staff facilitate House Floor proceedings, report and transcribe House Floor and Committee hearings, and provide streaming video and legislative activity updates. The Clerk's office compiles and distributes legislative records and documents through print and digital channels.

Support for House Floor Operations

The Clerk's Office is responsible for supporting the legislative process in its many dimensions, as required by statute and the *Rules of the House of Representatives*. Our bill clerks process all newly introduced bills and accompanying Constitutional Authority Statements. Tally clerks record all votes cast in the House through the Electronic Voting System (EVS) or manually in the House Well. They also create the official House Calendar and process all committee reports filed in the House. Our journal clerks produce the constitutionally mandated *Journal of the House of Representatives* and handle all Presidential Messages received by the House. As bills pass in the House, our enrolling clerks prepare the official text for transmission to the Senate or the White House. In addition to their duties of announcing pending business on the House Floor, our reading clerks deliver bills and messages to the Senate. Whenever the House is in session, our staff is hard at work supporting Floor operations.

Transparency and Accessibility of House Floor Proceedings

While supporting these key aspects of the legislative process, the Clerk's office is also responsible for making House Floor proceedings transparent and accessible to the public. In FY2016, the Clerk's Office was involved in the following efforts.

Webcasting House proceedings using HouseLive brings real time legislative activity to the public but also allows users to research previous proceedings through archived video. Use of this service continues to increase with Member offices actively using the "clipping tool." During the second half of 2015, HouseLive had nearly 117,000 visitors, and House offices used its video clipping tool to create and download 1,177 videos of Floor activity. In December, the 10,000th video clip was produced.



Improvements are needed to the current system and we look forward to future upgrades that will enhance capabilities.

During the current fiscal year, we worked with our EVS vendor to create and install voting display board covers in coordination with upgrades performed by the Architect of the Capitol. Our office also upgraded the EVS system servers to a new operating system. We are currently working with our vendor to update the voting stations, voting card technology, and the voting station network. This is a multi-year project and work will proceed through FY2017 and beyond.

For the last several months we have been fully engaged in the re-design of the Clerk website (clerk.house.gov). This project will continue into the next fiscal year with a beta version of the main page anticipated in January 2017. The new website will greatly improve ease of navigation, provide robust search capabilities, and allow increased access to legislative information.

Support for Committee Operations

In addition to its support for legislative operations on the House Floor, the Clerk's Office provides a number of services to assist House committees in fulfilling their legislative responsibilities. The Legislative Computer Systems team provides the XML editor XMetaL to committees (and to the Office of Legislative Counsel) to assist in the production of legislative documents. The division also maintains the Committee Repository (docs.house.gov) and provides technical support to committee staff as they add meeting information for markups and hearings and other data to this publicly available site. In addition to transcribing Floor activity, the Office of Official Reporters transcribes Committee hearings and markups, depositions, and field hearings. Our House librarians provide research services for committees and offer regular training through the House Learning Center to assist legislative staff with their research needs. Our professional archivists provide regular consultations and assistance to committee staff in complying with their archival obligations under House Rules. They also oversee all committee records maintained at the National Archives and Records Administration and assist committees in recalling their archived records as needed.

Transparency and Accessibility of Committee Proceedings

The Office of the Clerk is proud of the progress being made to improve the transparency of the committee process. The Committee Repository has been enhanced over the last year to allow for expanded committee information. This site remains a one-stop shop for the Members, staff, and the public to access daily committee schedules, hearing and mark-up notices, testimony, text of amendments, and tally sheets for recorded votes. Working with our partners, we have provided assistance to the Hearing Modernization Project to include writing document standards and updating docs.house.gov in support of the project.



Access to Legislative Documents

The Clerk's Office continues to chair the Bulk Data Task Force, which was established at the direction of this Subcommittee in 2012. The task force has made great progress in providing access to legislative documents via bulk data download. As you know, this has been a very successful collaboration and has improved transparency and access to legislative information. Just last week, Bill Status information was released in bulk format. Releasing Bill Status data in bulk is an important milestone in modernizing congressional data because data users who currently "screen scrape" Thomas.gov can transition to using this bulk data, and the Library of Congress is one step closer to retiring Thomas.gov. This latest step has been well received by those that frequently use congressional data. Also, we are assisting the Rules Committee in publishing the *House Manual*, including the House Rules, in XML format. For FY2017, I expect the task force to continue to work in collaboration with all stakeholders and partners to make additional progress in transparency and access to the work of the House of Representatives.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the outstanding contributions of the late Chuck Turner. He and his helpful participation and insights into the legislative process will be greatly missed by all the members of the task force.

THE HOUSE LIBRARY, ARCHIVES, ART AND HISTORY OF THE HOUSE: PRESERVATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS RESPONSIBILITIES

The Clerk's organization serves as the custodian of all noncurrent records of the House and oversees the curatorial care of fine art and artifacts in the House Collection. This support extends to the dissemination of information about House records and the Collection. We also provide guidance to committees and Officers on managing and archiving records and consultation with Member offices on records management and courtesy storage.

Public Access to Archived House Records

The House has assigned the Clerk's Office the important work of preserving its archived records. To do so, our professional archivists provide all House committees and offices with ongoing training and consultation for proper records management. As required by House Rules, each committee transfers its noncurrent records to the Clerk's Office at the end of each Congress. Our office in turn transfers those records to the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA) Center for Legislative Archives, where they are professionally maintained and made publicly available in accordance with House Rules. The Center for Legislative Archives ensures House records are accessible, given that electronic records are received in a variety of formats, including new technologies.



From July to December 2015, we archived 181,500 pages of House records, assisted committees as they retrieved 58,500 pages of archived records and returned 78,250 pages lent, and transferred 20.8 GB of electronic records to NARA.

Securing space to store these records has been an ongoing challenge. With the support of the Committee and collaboration with our partners, we believe a solution is near that will resolve this problem for the foreseeable future.

The House Library provides legislative research resources and assistance and online database access to Members and staff. To continue to improve and streamline the research capabilities offered to the House community, library staff are preparing for a transition from the Library's current cataloging software to a more robust system. To simplify user research, we also developed a new portal for the House Library's public computers. This system is in the testing phase and features comprehensive guides on legislative research topics. Work on this project will continue into FY2017. The Library continues to add subscription research databases and make them available to Members and staff. These services are a useful resource to the House and save Member and Committee offices funds.

The Library space in the Cannon House Office Building has served an increasing number of patrons this fiscal year. As part of our ongoing efforts to increase our support of and engagement with Member offices, the Library has hosted several events so far this fiscal year, including a well-attended open house and the first program in a new series of book talks. We plan to host book talks on a regular basis and teach legislative research classes in the House Learning Center.

Art and History

Along with our efforts to make House records open and accessible to the public, the Clerk's Office continues to make the art and history of the House publicly accessible in a variety of ways.

In 2015, we, along with the Historian's office, promoted the History, Art & Archives website (history.house.gov) to the House community and the public in a variety of ways. This effort resulted in a 28 percent increase from 2014 to 2015 of unique visitors to the site (more than 2.1 million total). It also resulted in 7 million unique page clicks on the site, a 38 percent increase from 2014. We also increased the visibility of the @USHouseHistory Twitter feed, which now has nearly 150,000 followers.

We are planning two major efforts in this area during the upcoming fiscal year. First, we will be commemorating the election (in 1916) and the swearing-in (in 1917) of Representative Jeannette Rankin, the first woman to serve in Congress. Plans to commemorate these anniversaries are underway and include an exhibit to mark the 2017 centennial of her arrival in the House and the first generation of women in Congress.

The major themes of the exhibition will be the election, congressional service, and door-opening career of Jeannette Rankin; the first generation of women in Congress (1917–1945); and the



legislative interests and accomplishments of these women. The estimated \$65,000 cost for this project is included in our FY2017 budget request and includes outside contractor assistance to develop, design, and build a museum-quality exhibition that will be durable and appropriate for the public spaces of the U.S. Capitol. It will also include costs related to research in the Rankin papers and outside assistance to include video, artifacts, historic documents, photographs, and interpretive and interactive elements in the display.

The second major project concerns upgrading the *The Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress* website (bioguide.congress.gov), known as the Bioguide. As you know, the Bioguide is based on a print publication dating back to 1859. The Office of the House Historian, the Clerk's Office of Art and Archives, and the Senate Historical Office provide and maintain the content of this important reference resource. The website includes standard biographical information and, when available, images, bibliographic information, and relevant archival resources. Launched in 1998, the online database provides biographical data on each current Member and each of the more than 12,000 former Members of Congress. Multiple applications within the House, Senate, and Library of Congress organizations rely on information from this database. In its nearly 19-year existence, the website has not been upgraded and the database portion has had only minor software upgrades. With the retirement of the [Thomas.gov](http://thomas.gov) website, it is the oldest website on Capitol Hill.

Working with the Clerk's Legislative Computer Systems, the Historian's office and the Clerk's office are taking an incremental approach to the Bioguide upgrade. In 2015, a vendor was hired to create a technical requirements document for an upgraded website and database. Our estimate of the total multi-year cost to overhaul the Bioguide is between \$150,000 and \$300,000, based upon our experience building the History, Art & Archives website (history.house.gov). The requested FY2017 sum (\$75,000) is the estimated amount needed to initiate the second phase of the website upgrade, which includes back-end infrastructure improvements and front-end design.

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to its work supporting the legislative operations of the House and preserving its records, art, and history, the Clerk's Office plays a major role in providing public disclosure information, as required by law and the Rules of the House.

Financial Disclosure

Our records and registration staff process financial disclosure and periodic transaction reports submitted by Members, Officers, candidates, and House and legislative branch employees who qualify as senior staff, and make them publicly available online and through the Legislative Resource Center, as required by law. Our office is working on enhancements to the Financial Disclosure Online Reporting application (fd.house.gov) to update multiple filer and administrative functions. We will continue to work to improve this site and anticipate this effort will be ongoing.



Lobbying Disclosure

The Clerk's Office also continues its efforts to enhance its lobbying disclosure filing system in coordination with the Secretary of the Senate, who shares responsibility for administering the filing requirements of the Lobbying Disclosure Act. To ensure compliance with the act, the Office emailed reminders to approximately 12,000 registrants before the deadlines and sent follow-up notices after due dates. The Office sends additional notifications throughout the filing period to keep users informed of filing requirements. As with financial disclosure, this work will continue through FY2017 and beyond.

PLANNING AND BUDGET REQUEST FOR FY2017

The Clerk's Office seeks to carry out its legislative, preservation, and public disclosure responsibilities in an efficient and cost-effective manner. Currently, the Office is operating 19 percent below its peak budget. Even so, we anticipate growing demand for our services, especially our efforts to further enhance the transparency of the House's legislative operations and the accessibility of its legislative data, official reports, and public disclosure filings. Much of this work falls to the Legislative Computer Systems division as they design programs and applications to facilitate and provide access to information. I expect this to continue to be a major area of growth for our office in the foreseeable future. In addition to the examples previously mentioned in my testimony, we are working to modernize the current requisition system. Our current upgrades will allow us to better track and reconcile Government Publishing Office orders. In the future, we hope to create an online venue for Member Offices and committees to input letterhead and stationery orders. This ongoing effort will benefit all House offices, but it is just one of the many projects currently being developed by our programmers. All of this work would not be possible without the dedicated group of professionals that compose the Clerk's organization. Our staff appreciate the many opportunities to assist the House in support of its legislative duties. We continue to work to maximize our efforts in the most efficient manner that will result in the best value for the House.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's ongoing support for the operations of the Office of the Clerk. For the upcoming fiscal year, we respectfully request \$26,411,000 to carry out our existing and new responsibilities to the House. In addition to the previously mentioned projects and anticipated increases in software license and maintenance costs, this \$1.4 million increase includes additional personnel costs, such as filling vacant positions to meet increasing demand for our services. Personnel costs make up more than 80 percent of our budget. In the past, we have been able to lower non-personnel costs to cover anticipated payroll increases; however, the growing demand to modernize systems and applications to carry out the core functions of the House does not allow us to continue that practice for FY2017.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

