

**Statement of Karen Donfried
Director, Congressional Research Service
Before the
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
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Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present the fiscal 2026 budget request on behalf of the Congressional Research Service (CRS). In addition to outlining CRS's budget requirements for the upcoming fiscal year, my testimony will provide an overview of CRS's work in support of Congress during fiscal 2024, and bring you up to date on the Service's progress with respect to several strategic initiatives.

Fiscal 2024 marked a period of transition for CRS. After his appointment as Interim Director, my predecessor, Robert Newlen, embarked upon a number of initiatives to improve internal and external communication, explore technology-based solutions to strengthen the Service's research and analytic capacity, facilitate a modernized workforce management system, and foster innovation in the delivery of products and services to Congress. I began my term as CRS Director in September of 2024, and as I complete the first six months of my tenure, I am committed to building upon the momentum and accomplishments of Director Newlen.

FISCAL 2026 BUDGET REQUEST AND PROGRAM INCREASES

CRS's budget request for fiscal 2026 is 144.568 million dollars, an increase of 8.488 million dollars (or 6.2 percent) over the amount appropriated in the Full Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025. The requested increase includes 5.013 million dollars for mandatory pay related and price level increases and a programmatic increase of 3.475 million dollars to support continued enhancement of CRS's data analytic and artificial intelligence capabilities. As in previous fiscal years, staff pay and benefits account for approximately 90 percent of CRS's budget request. Thus, operating under the appropriated fiscal 2024 level in fiscal 2025 has led to significant cuts to research materials and training, as we preserve our most important asset, our people.

CRS's priorities for fiscal 2026 include preparation for the New Members Seminar for the incoming 120th Congress; maximizing the use of text analytics and related functionality to enhance access to products on CRS.gov; and continued enhancement of the Service's IT infrastructure and quantitative data analytic capability. Underlying each of these initiatives will be CRS's focus on the delivery of timely, authoritative, nonpartisan, and objective products and services tailored to meet the needs of Congress.

Strengthening Data Analysis Capabilities and Exploring Artificial Intelligence Applications

CRS's requested program increase for fiscal 2026 includes approximately 3.5 million dollars to continue enhancement of the Service's capacity to perform quantitative data analysis and policy

simulation, including the modeling of “big data” sets, for congressional clients. In recent years, CRS has observed an increasing demand from Members and committees, to provide this type of analytical support. While CRS has conducted some limited quantitative analysis and policy simulation, currently it lacks the capacity to provide this service on a broader scale.

In the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Congress encouraged CRS “*to explore ways to expand its ability to perform quantitative analysis of research data....*” and directed the Service to “*engage with an external entity to produce a report detailing the feasibility of CRS engaging in the analysis and modeling of big data sets by highlighting the information technology infrastructure, staffing, and analytical support required to establish and maintain such a capability.*” In response to the direction provided in the Joint Statement, CRS contracted with a company in fiscal 2022, to conduct a study identifying the IT infrastructure, staffing, and analytical support required to establish and maintain a greater data analytics capability. In September 2023, CRS procured a vendor to pilot a small set of cloud based quantitative data models consistent with the recommendations in the study. Additional resources are required to continue supporting these and future data models in the cloud.

Enhancing its ability to perform quantitative data analysis would enable CRS to more precisely assess, and communicate to congressional requestors, the impact of legislative proposals on various demographic groups, as well as the interaction of such policies with other programs.

CRS is also exploring opportunities to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) applications into its workflow. In fiscal 2023, the Service established an Artificial Intelligence Working Group (AIWG), which continues to make recommendations to CRS leadership on best practices and operational processes necessary for the adoption of AI technologies. The adoption of any AI technology at CRS must enable adherence to CRS core values, and deliver on the potential to create efficiencies in the development and publication of products for Congress and in the accessibility and utility of data.

CRS would allocate 1.076 million dollars of the requested amount to contract two teams of data personnel (data scientists, programmers, and digital interface designers) in its research divisions, to develop and maintain data models and projects in a cloud-based environment. An additional 1.466 million dollars would be invested in the tools required to setup and maintain a secure cloud computing environment and the datasets necessary to expand CRS’s data analytic capacity. In addition, CRS would utilize 560,000 dollars to acquire modeling tools, AI software and associated user training resources. The remaining 373,000 dollars would be expended on training and contractual support for IT security services to support Security Assessment & Authorization (SA&A) efforts, to obtain/maintain system Authority-To-Operate (ATO), and to support system development and operations through designing, testing, and deploying cloud native software.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The program increases requested by CRS illustrate its continuing commitment to explore opportunities to enhance its products, services, and operational capabilities to meet the needs of an evolving Congress. Of note recently, in April 2025, CRS is implementing a realignment of several offices and sections that will optimize the use of resources and staff expertise. These

changes, which are focused on the infrastructure side of CRS, will increase synergies throughout the Service, improve efficiency, and buttress CRS staff's many efforts to provide excellent products and services to Congress. The following is a brief summary of CRS's progress with respect to other initiatives focused on achieving this important objective.

Product Innovation: Interactive Graphics and Other Visually-Based Products

CRS continues to focus on the development of new, visually-based products through the efforts of its Visualization and GIS Section. This past year, CRS has worked to streamline the production of interactive graphics within written products, address technical issues that arise, including through the use of an AI coding tool, facilitate innovation in interactive displays, and expand interactive visual options. In addition, CRS has explored adaptation of content into interactive infographics within short reports; assessed additional chart options for creating interactive graphic formats; and worked closely with OCIO to ensure that CRS's IT infrastructure is more compatible with its interactive graphic needs.

As of March 2025, CRS's product line includes 71 infographics and 79 interactive graphics. CRS is also piloting and has published a new interactive report product (also known as "storymap"), a next-generation platform that integrates interactive, multimedia, and visual elements to create a narrative. These innovative products represent CRS's forward-thinking focus on presenting its research, analysis, and information to Congress in new, accessible, and user-friendly formats.

Recruitment and Retention of a Skilled and Productive Workforce

CRS continued its efforts to recruit, retain, and professionally develop a highly skilled and collaborative workforce. During fiscal 2024, the Service submitted postings for 62 merit selection positions and attended 10 recruiting events. Attendance at these events provided an opportunity to engage with a variety of prospective candidates, to increase awareness of CRS's brand as well as available employment and internship opportunities. These efforts were part of a broader multi-year recruiting campaign which has succeeded in returning CRS staffing to pre-pandemic levels.

CRS offered training opportunities for leadership, writing, and presentation skills and to support a variety of other activities to enhance staff professional development. Staff attended sessions on technology topics including: statistics and visualization in excel; R programming; data management; and a series of forums discussing various artificial intelligence applications. Further, CRS has encouraged staff engagement through a series of listening sessions and expanded training.

Exploring Artificial Intelligence Applications

CRS continues to evaluate the potential of AI technologies to enhance support for Congress consistent with the Service's mission and core values. Under the guidance of the CRS Artificial Intelligence Working Group (AIWG), CRS has tested and evaluated a number of AI tools and models for legal research and analysis, editing and writing assistance, and drafting CRS bill summaries. In the case of bill summaries, CRS, in collaboration with OCIO, tested multiple AI approaches using six different Large Language Models (LLMs) and, unfortunately these

summaries failed to meet CRS standards for accuracy, coherence, relevance, and objectivity (less than 3% of 3000 summaries were acceptable). These results have identified some opportunities to explore the use of AI at different stages of the bill summary workflow (research, analysis, and writing and review).

Evaluation of AI tools for use in various parts of the CRS workflow involves assessment of their relative utility in assisting CRS staff in providing timely support for Congress and the extent to which adequate safeguards are present to ensure the authoritativeness or confidentiality CRS's work product. Notably, as a product of ongoing efforts to evaluate AI tools and models, CRS has approved its first AI tool for use by CRS staff. The tool is a commercial subscription product that provides java script coding assistance to CRS Visual Information Specialists to assist them with the production of interactive graphics in CRS products.

CRS is actively engaging with AI developers, legislative and parliamentary research organizations, and national libraries to share information and identify additional AI technologies for potential CRS use cases. CRS's requested program increase (outlined above) reflects the Service's anticipated need for additional resources to support the further evaluation and deployment of AI tools and models to assist with various CRS workflows. In the first instance, these AI tools or software would support data analysis, but CRS would look for these tools to be as flexible as possible to enable us to address a range of use cases and maximize the impact of our investment.

IT Modernization

CRS continues to work closely with the Library's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) to modernize its core IT systems and move toward full migration into the cloud-based M365 platform. In partnership with OCIO, the Service has implemented more than 100 improvements to its congressional relationship management system ("Minerva") since initial deployment in 2023; many suggested by CRS staff, as part of the continuous development approach implemented by OCIO. In addition, CRS continued the migration of its authoring and publishing and content management systems into the M365 environment.

In fiscal 2024, CRS accomplished the rollout of a new and improved Text Analysis Program (TAP 2.0) that uses Natural Language Processing to research, analyze, compare, and summarize bills and supports the "Related Bills" feature on Congress.gov. In addition, CRS anticipates the release of the newly redesigned CRS.gov website that will include an enhanced taxonomy and a new search capability later this month.

Congress.gov

CRS continues to actively engage with House, Senate, and GPO data partners in support of multiple initiatives to improve the interoperability of data sources aggregated by Congress.gov. Fiscal year 2024 marked an historic, behind-the-scenes accomplishment for authoritative information produced by our House and Senate data partners. House and Senate data partners collaborated with the Library to retire first generation, 30–40-year-old out-of-date data sources for Congress.gov. Modernizing behind-the-scenes workflows advances our legislative data

partnerships, to support better tracking of legislative information and Member contributions through Congress.gov.

CRS is deeply appreciative for our data partners' efforts to improve data quality by standardizing formats for legislative documents. The United States Legislative Markup, or USLM, is a legislative branch-wide standard that is integral to future editing and publishing interoperability within the legislative ecosystem. We look forward to integrating USLM into Congress.gov which will improve the user experience.

Continuous engagement with users, and continuous collaboration among specialized staff across all legislative branch data partners is key to our collective progress. During fiscal 2025, we continue to deliver user-focused enhancements, including the recent release of HTML for CRS products in Congress.gov and through the Congress.gov API (Application Programming Interface). We are also working with House Clerk colleagues to provide House vote data through the Congress.gov API and to feature "exchange of letters" data regarding jurisdictional interests between House committees.

To date, researchers can access more than 3.5 million historical and contemporary items from Congress.gov. We remain committed to working with our data partners, including House Clerk and House Digital Services partners, to continually improve accuracy, timeliness, and completeness of legislative information available from Congress.gov—the official website for U.S. federal legislative information.

(CONAN) Modernization

Known officially as the "Constitution of the United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation," CONAN serves as the official record of the U.S. Constitution for Congress. In 2019, CRS collaborated with OCIO and the Law Library to introduce a website for CONAN: constitution.congress.gov. This site features hundreds of pages of updated constitutional analysis and content. During fiscal 2024, CRS's CONAN attorneys continued to provide comprehensive analysis of the Supreme Court's jurisprudence as it relates to every provision of the U.S. Constitution, including the implications of recently decided cases. To make CONAN more accessible to online users, content has been drafted and revised in the form of short, granular essays that focus on specific, discrete topics. CRS has also been preparing the printed pocket part to the decennial 2022 edition of CONAN. Since the launch of the public website in 2019, CONAN has received more than seventy million views and remains the most up-to-date source of constitutional analysis.

As part of the Library of Congress's Legislative and Appropriations Request to the 118th Congress, CRS requested elimination of the statutory requirement to publish CONAN and its supplements in hardbound copy. On March 8, 2024, Representative Bice introduced H.R.7592, a bill "To direct the Librarian of Congress to promote the more cost-effective, efficient, and expanded availability of the Annotated Constitution and pocket-part supplements by replacing the hardbound versions with digital versions." The bill was approved by the House on September 9, 2024 and referred to the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration on September 10th. In the 119th Congress,

similar legislation, H.R. 1234, was introduced by Representative Bice on February 12, 2025 and referred to the Committee on House Administration.

Outreach to Members and Committees

In fiscal 2024, CRS engaged in a variety of efforts to target its outreach to Member and Committee offices. The Service offered twice monthly introductory briefings to congressional staff, as well as a series of congressional programs to highlight the legislative research and analysis that CRS provides to all Members. CRS contacted Chiefs of Staff and state and district directors to offer briefings on the products and services available to DC and district offices. In addition, CRS's research divisions engaged with the relevant committees of jurisdiction to inform Members and staff of the products and expertise available to support their legislative and oversight activities. Interim Director Newlen also personally engaged Members of Congress at Library events and solicited direct feedback regarding CRS service, which I have continued in fiscal 2025.

In addition, CRS worked closely with the Committee on House Administration to plan the New Members Seminar for the incoming class of the 119th Congress. Held in January 2025, the Seminar included over 20 sessions on a variety of topics, and provided newly elected Members an opportunity to learn about the range of products, services, and expertise that CRS has to offer. The program was attended by 39 Members of the House.

Knowledge Management

CRS continues to develop and implement strategies to capture, manage, preserve, and distribute institutional knowledge that it relies upon to provide exceptional service to Congress. Utilizing robust cloud-based environments that foster better knowledge sharing with colleagues, CRS staff leverage a unique collection of resources, leading to greater efficiencies in everyday work, as well as employee on- and offboarding. At the end of fiscal 2024, the Service maintained 54 research portal sites and collaborative online spaces that contained topical content curated by experts across disciplines. CRS fosters collaboration by sharing knowledge and best practices through monthly meetings for communities of practice, a quarterly Knowledge Café, and an annual Summer Series on emerging technologies. For fiscal 2024, the summer series focused on knowledge management fundamentals and featured speakers from across the Library of Congress.

In February 2024, CRS began staffing its space in the Agency Connection Center (ACC). To consolidate services, the Knowledge Services Group will transfer its in-person reference and research support services from the La Follette Congressional Reading Room (LCRR) to the ACC effective November 1st, 2025. In partnership with the Committee on House Administration and the other liaisons sharing the space, CRS participated in the ACC Swear-In Day event on January 3, 2025. This event provided CRS staff an opportunity to promote its services to House staff.

FISCAL 2024 IN BRIEF

In fiscal 2024, CRS continued to fulfill its mission “to serve Congress with the highest quality of research, analysis, information, and confidential consultation, to support the exercise of its legislative, representational, and oversight duties....” In the past fiscal year, Congress called upon

CRS research and analytical expertise at every stage of the legislative process and across all public policy issues on its agenda. CRS experts handled over 75,000 congressional requests, published over 1,000 new products, and updated over 1,700 existing products. In addition, the Service bolstered its growing library of multimedia products, posting 146 new videos and podcasts to CRS.gov on a variety of topics including: gene editing in agriculture, organized retail crime, expiring tax provisions in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, artificial intelligence regulation, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) legislative process, the Baltimore bridge collapse, and discussion of recent Supreme Court opinions and other legal developments. As in previous years, CRS provided support to virtually every Member and committee office.

Service to Congress

CRS experts provided research, analytical and consultative support to Members, committees and congressional staff on a wide range of public policy issues including: the impact of low-income assistance programs, competition with China, economic and tax policy, federal emergency management assistance, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and reauthorization of the farm bill. CRS legislative attorneys advised on federal criminal law, legal questions associated with the statutory Tik-Tok ban, tribal issues, and the implications of recent Supreme Court opinions, including the Court's decision in *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo* which overturned the *Chevron* doctrine requiring judicial deference to administrative agency interpretations. In addition, CRS analysts and attorneys provided testimony before congressional committees on issues related to the continuity of Congress; social security; regulation of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) as hazardous substances; servicemember access to safe, high-quality pharmaceuticals; and U.S. Coast Guard involvement in drug enforcement, illegal migration and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. CRS also continued to provide guidance on questions regarding legislative and budget process, congressional oversight, and the annual appropriations bills.

CRS hosted over 12,500 congressional attendees at its 350 programs and institutes in fiscal 2024. The Service conducted seminar series on topics including: financial services, disruptive technology, and immigration. In addition, CRS held its annual Issues and Policies seminar; the Legislative and Budget Process Institute; the semiannually scheduled Federal Law Update series; as well as several CRS Defense Institute sessions throughout the year.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of my colleagues at CRS, I would like to express my appreciation to the Committee for its continued support. CRS greatly values its role as a trusted source of research, analysis and information for the Congress. As we begin this 119th Congress, I look forward to the Committee's input on how CRS can improve its products and services and strengthen operational capabilities. I thank you again for your consideration of our fiscal 2026 request.