

Congresswoman Lori Trahan's

Written Statement for the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress

Member Day Hearing

Thursday, April 15, 2021

After graduating from Georgetown University in my early twenties, I joined the staff of former Congressman Marty Meehan as a scheduler, and over the course of eight years I worked in a range of roles eventually serving as the Chief of Staff. Before returning to Congress as a Member over a decade later, I worked in the private sector. I watched what a well-resourced team with access to state-of-the-art technology could accomplish and more importantly, the level of service they could provide customers. As you know, congressional offices can be incredibly resourceful on behalf of our constituents, and I believe we could accomplish even more for the American people if we had access to the innovative tools available to the private sector.

On the Energy & Commerce Committee, we demand greater transparency from our largest companies – some might call them “monopolies”—in the tech industry as well as telecom, energy and healthcare. It is only right that tax-payers have greater insight into Congress. Well-designed web platforms can make it easier for the public to know the bills and amendments under consideration as well as the Dear Colleague letters that get circulated – particularly this time of year. Why, for example, does it take so long for bill text to appear on congress.gov? Shouldn't it be nearly instantaneous? Additionally, technology can also bring transparency to committee processes and caucuses.¹

With modest investments, Congress can build and implement technology systems to track how specific amendments may change legislation or better understand the impacts of proposed legislation to current law.² These tools would be useful for the public, journalists and think tanks—and they would allow congressional staff to focus their efforts on serving constituents in ways that technology cannot replace.

The House should also be able to bulk purchase licenses for constituent management systems and customer service portals.³ The companies over which we conduct oversight often have these basic systems to manage their communications with Congress; and Congress should have similarly equipped systems, including the accompanying training and support. Of course, to best meet the needs of our constituents, these systems must be efficient and follow the best practices for data security and privacy protections.

¹ The Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress Final Report, 116th Congress, Chapter 1, 2020

² *Id.* Chapter 1

³ *Id.* Chapter 6

Thank you to Chairman Kilmer and Vice Chair Timmons for your leadership on these issues. I am grateful for the Committee's work and excited to support the implementation of your thoughtful recommendations.