



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas

Full Committee Hearing

Experts Needed: Options for Improved Science and Technology Advice for Congress

December 5, 2019

Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson for holding this hearing today. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss ways to improve the resources available to Congress for science and technology issues.

Over the last few years, we've heard that some members of Congress do not believe they have the resources they need to evaluate science and technology issues. In response, the Appropriations Committees have taken a number of steps to address these concerns.

First, they have directed the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to expand its technology assessment capabilities. Since 2007 Congress has funded GAO to do this S&T work.

At the direction of the appropriators, GAO also stood up a separate Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics team. I look forward to hearing from Dr. Persons about that effort, and the plans to grow that team to meet the needs of Congress.

Second, appropriators directed the Congressional Research Service (CRS) to commission a study by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) to identify gaps in congressional S&T resources and make recommendations.

That report was just released a few weeks ago. I appreciate the thoughtful work the study committee did to understand the needs of Congress and recommend thoughtful solutions. We will hear more about those recommendations today from a member of the study committee, Mr. McCord.

I believe Chairwoman Johnson and I agree that one of our most important jobs as a Committee is to serve as a resource on the science and technology issues that come before us—not just for our Committee Members but for the entire House. We are fortunate to have staff on both sides of the aisle with a variety of expertise in science, engineering, policy, and the law.

Our staff provides good counsel and they also can tap into a wealth of knowledge from outside expertise on subjects ranging from quantum computing to engineering biology.

However, I recognize that our staff does not have the capacity to provide the type of support and analysis needed by every Member of Congress.

So I'm eager to hear more about the resources GAO is providing, and NAPA's recommendations on how we can best meet our informational needs.

In my time in Congress, I have witnessed Committee and Member office budgets shrink, and our ability to retain and pay staff diminish. I look forward to hearing ideas from our panel about how can attract and retain S&T talent.

Also, thoughts on how to communicate to our constituents the importance of Congress being able to have the capacity to fulfill its constitutional duties, particularly when it comes to dealing with the challenges and opportunities of emerging technologies.

I am one of the few members of this Committee who was in Congress in 1994 when the Office of Technology Assessment was defunded, and when those functions were later transitioned to the GAO and CRS.

At the time, many on my side of the aisle saw the OTA as duplicative of other resources. Many also believed that the office had strayed from its intended purpose of being an unbiased, non-partisan organization.

For the last few years, there has been a small but passionate contingent of Congress members and think tank experts who have advocated for reinstating the OTA. I think there is a tendency to look to the past with rose colored glasses. And that if we just went back to the way things were, everything that's wrong with Congress would be fixed.

Well, not everything in Congress worked perfectly when I came here in 1994, and it's certainly not working perfectly now. I think there is merit in evaluating what would serve our Members best in the 21st Century, as we are doing today.

I still believe the U.S. Congress is the best deliberative body in the world. I look forward to a positive, bipartisan discussion today on how to help make it better, to best serve the American people.