

Testimony for the Record: FY 2018 Legislative Branch Budget Request

Submitted by:
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President, Civic Impulse, LLC

To:
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Legislative Branch

Regarding:
Public Access to Legislative Information

April 28, 2017

Dear members of the subcommittee:

Each year ten million individuals use our free website www.GovTrack.us to research and track legislation in the U.S. Congress. Our users include journalists, legislative affairs professionals, legislative staff on the Hill, advocates, teachers, students, and of course member of the general public. This testimony is submitted on their behalf.

I would like to begin by *commending* the subcommittee for its support of important programs in the last several years that have allowed us to bring accurate and timely information to our users:

- The **House Bulk Data Taskforce's legislative bulk data** program, which went live in 2016 and was a joint effort of the Government Publishing Office, the Library of Congress, the Clerk of the House, and the Senate, has allowed us to disseminate the most accurate information yet about the status of pending legislation.
- Several projects of the House Committee on House Administration including **Docs.house.gov**, publishing the **United States Code in XML**¹ (with the Law Revision Counsel), improving the **bill drafting process using XML** (with the Office of Legislative Counsel), and the yearly **Legislative Data and Transparency conference**.
- Improvements to the **House Clerk's website**, including new member information.
- The launch of **Congress.gov** by the Library of Congress, and its **agile**-lead improvements since its launch, which is an example for the whole legislative branch in how best to develop modern technology.
- **Digitization** and publication of core historical documents by the Government Publishing Office and Library of Congress, including the Congressional Record, Statutes at Large, and Constitution Annotated (though more work is needed here).

¹ In my personal capacity I was a sub-contractor on this project.

Public access to legislative information remains an important need, and the subcommittee's support for programs that provide such access **ensures that accurate information reaches the American public** – the tens of millions of Americans who include not only our users but also Americans who learn about their government by reading newspapers and magazines which rely on our service and Congress.gov for their research.

I also *commend* the staff at the House offices and legislative branch agencies named above who have done remarkable work in producing **accurate, durable, and timely** information within the constraints that an institution like the House of Representatives requires.

To *continue the subcommittee's commitment to public access to legislative information*, I respectfully recommend the following:

- Create a **public advisory committee on legislative transparency** for stakeholders to engage systematically on this issue, including but not limited to access to data.
- Make the **Bulk Data Taskforce** permanent and fund the participation of the offices and agencies that are members of the taskforce.
- Support congressional publication of other important information in a structured data format, including **amendments, House committee votes, the Biographical Directory (Bioguide), and committee witness** documents.
- Continue to support efforts to modernize the House's technology systems especially with respect to the work of **committees** and efforts to **connect constituents to their representatives**. Cultivate the legislative branch's **in-house technology talent** as other parts of the government are doing.
- **Increase House staff levels** above their current historic lows so the House has sufficient capacity for policy analysis and oversight and **direct the Congressional Research Service to report on** how staffing levels impact the House's capacity to function, and make that report public.
- Systematically release the **non-confidential Congressional Research Service reports** to the general public. Years of experience has demonstrated that public access to these reports enhances the public debate without creating a commensurate burden.

I would be glad to discuss these topics further and tell you more about how the work of the House on public access to legislative information translates into a stronger democracy.

Yours,

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Bio for Joshua Tauberer:

Joshua Tauberer, Ph.D., is the founder and president of Civic Impulse, LLC, the organization behind the website www.GovTrack.us. GovTrack provides free legislative reference and tracking tools to around 10 million individuals annually and has provided bulk data and GIS information services to dozens of House member and caucus offices. GovTrack is regularly cited in the news media for policy and fact-checking information. Tauberer is an expert in the legislative process, a pioneer in the field of open government, an entrepreneur, and a software developer that has also worked with the House Office of the Law Revision Counsel and the District of Columbia municipal government on improving the publication process of the law. Tauberer was the lead organizer for five years of a 300-person civic technology event and is a member of the Open Government Advisory Group to the DC mayor. Tauberer holds a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania.

Witness Disclosure Form

Clause 2(g) of rule XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives requires non-governmental witnesses to disclose to the Committee the following information. A non-governmental witness is any witness appearing on behalf of himself/herself or on behalf of an organization other than a federal agency, or a state, local or tribal government.

<p>Your Name, Business Address, and Telephone Number: Joshua Tauberer 202-558-7227 Civic Impulse LLC 3460 14th St NW #125 Washington, DC 20010</p>
<p>1. Are you appearing on behalf of yourself or a non-governmental organization? Please list organization(s) you are representing. On behalf of Civic Impulse, LLC.</p>
<p>2. Have you or any organization you are representing received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants or subcontracts) since October 1, 2012 related to the agencies or programs funded by the Subcommittee?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes No</p>
<p>3. Have you or any organization you are representing received any contracts or payments originating with a foreign government since October 1, 2012 related to the agencies or programs funded by the Subcommittee?</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>4. If your response to question #2 and/or #3 is "Yes", please list the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof), and/or the amount and country of origin of any payment or contract originating with a foreign government. Please also indicate whether the recipient was you or the organization(s) you are representing.</p> <p>I (personally) received a subcontract for the House Administration Committee's OLRC US Code modernization project in the amount of approx. \$25,000.</p>

Signature:  Date: April 28, 2017