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Testimony for the Record submitted to the
House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
April 2019

Dear Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Herrera Beutler, and members of the subcommittee,

In the last year, our free public website www.GovTrack.us helped **9 million Americans** learn about and participate in their government. Our site is a research and legislative tracking tool for the daily activities of the United States Congress, and our users include journalists, legislative affairs professionals, legislative staff on the Hill, advocates, students, educators, and of course members of the general public.

Americans care about what is happening in the legislative branch, and Congress's efforts to **publish its proceedings accurately, comprehensively, and comprehensibly** is an indispensable function of our government in this era when information travels fast. As I elaborate on below, we urge the subcommittee to appropriate funding strategically with these goals in mind.

In recent years, **this subcommittee has favorably reported appropriations legislation** — often following our requests in testimony just like this one — that, once enacted, has dramatically improved access to information about the work of the House of Representatives. Some examples include support for House Bulk Data Taskforce, the annual Legislative Data and Transparency Conference, digitization of the Congressional Record, public access to Congressional Research Service reports, and a committee meetings calendar on Congress.gov. We, and our users, thank you for these efforts.

This year we urge the subcommittee to take the pulse of Congress. It is a modest proposal that would set a long-term strategy in line with the goals above.

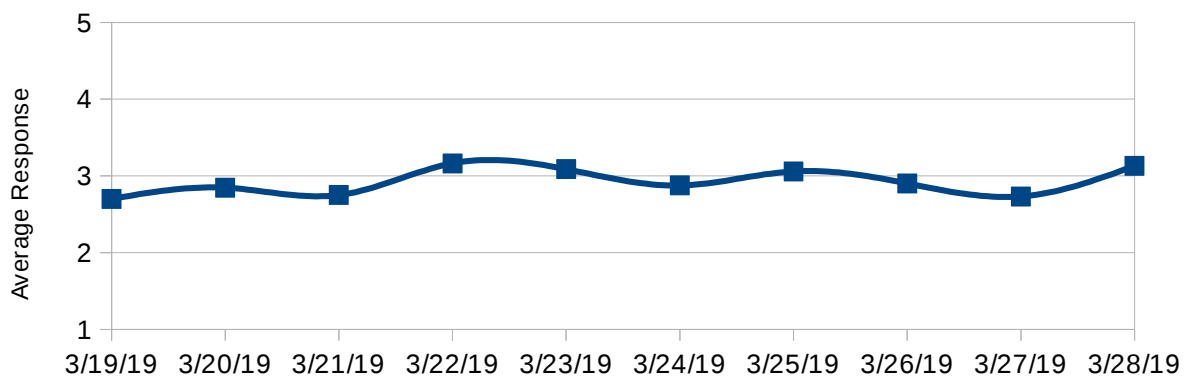
Virtually all large organizations operationalize their long-term goals as “Key Performance Indicators” or KPIs. A KPI is a measurable quantity that can be used to track progress on both external goals (How satisfied are our customers?) and internal goals (How much are we spending on paper?) over time. Why? You can't fix what you don't measure, a common saying goes. **It is time for Legislative Branch appropriators to develop KPIs to guide their strategic use of legislative branch funds.**

We can all agree that, if all other things are held equal, casework should be resolved faster. Measure that. We can all agree that, all things equal, Member office and committee staff should not leave because of a poor work environment. Measure that. We can all agree that, all things equal, a House of Representatives that passes well-researched, clearly written legislation is preferable to a House that passes obfuscated talking points.

Measure that. We can all agree that, all things equal, transcending partisanship is a good thing. Measure that.

Earlier this month we began measuring **Americans' satisfaction with the information available on the Internet about what Congress has been up to** by polling our users. We asked them to rate their satisfaction on a five-point scale:

How satisfied are you with the information available to you on the Internet about what Congress has been up to? Give five stars if you found all of the information you were looking for --- and more. Give one star if you couldn't find any information about Congress that you were looking for.



As technology gets better and it becomes easier to disseminate high-quality information about legislative events, this “mock KPI” ought to go up. But it won’t --- if it isn’t measured.

Appropriators should use KPIs like this one when evaluating legislative branch agency budget justifications and other potential appropriations. For instance, the Library of Congress’s 2020 budget justification¹ includes a \$750,000 request for the “[d]evelopment of a native iOS (Apple) and Android [mobile phone] app ... to provide an experience that is tuned specifically for mobile users” looking for information on Congress.gov. **Before granting this appropriation, appropriators should establish a Key Performance Indicator that justifies this request and that would be expected to improve if measured again** after the mobile app is developed. When used this way, a KPI would ensure that the subcommittee’s goals are aligned with those of the Library and, when measured again later, would reveal whether appropriated funds were well spent.

Most large organizations have an officer position such as a **Chief Performance Officer or a Chief Data Officer** who is responsible for establishing KPIs that reflect organizational goals, monitoring those KPIs over the long term, and creating this

¹ <https://www.loc.gov/static/portals/about/reports-and-budgets/documents/budgets/fy2020.pdf>

enhanced situational awareness of progress on the organization's mission that decision makers should have at hand. We urge the subcommittee to place this responsibility in a House-wide officer position who can provide to the subcommittee non-partisan expertise in how to best measure the activities of the legislative branch in alignment with your goals for the institution.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony and welcome the opportunity to discuss how creating Key Performance Indicators for public access to legislative information can create a stronger democracy.

Joshua Tauberer