Statement of Robert Randolph Newlen
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Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
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Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present the fiscal 2025 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 several noteworthy CRS accomplishments in its support for Congress during fiscal 2023, and update you on the Service's progress with respect to several strategic initiatives.

FISCAL 2025 BUDGET REQUEST AND PROGRAM INCREASES

CRS's budget request for fiscal 2025 is 145.485 million dollars, an increase of 9.405 million dollars (or 6.9 percent) over the amount appropriated for fiscal 2024. The requested increase includes 6.579 million dollars for mandatory pay related and price level increases. It also includes a programmatic increase to support continued enhancement of the Service's quantitative data analysis capabilities and the integration of artificial intelligence technology into CRS's workflow. As in previous fiscal years, staff pay and benefits account for approximately 90 percent of the amount requested by CRS.

Bolstering Quantitative Data Analysis Capabilities

CRS's requested program increase for fiscal 2025 includes approximately 3.5 million dollars and 1 FTE to enhance the Service's capability to perform quantitative data analysis and policy simulation, including the modeling of "big data" sets, for congressional clients. In recent years, CRS has observed growing demand from Members and Committees, to provide this type of analytical support. 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."* 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 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. Enhancing this area of its service offerings, would enable CRS to provide congressional requestors with a more granular view of 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 the day-to-day work of the Service. The Service established an Artificial Intelligence Working Group (AIWG) to make recommendations to CRS leadership on best practices and operational processes

necessary for the adoption of AI technologies. CRS's adoption of AI technology promises to create efficiencies in the development and publication of its products for Congress.

CRS would utilize 2.826 million dollars of the requested amount to set up and maintain a secure cloud computing environment, and to contract personnel (data scientists, programmers, and digital interface designers) to develop and maintain data analysis models and projects in that environment. The funds would also be used to invest in the software, modeling tools, and training necessary to develop these capabilities. An additional 643 thousand dollars is requested on behalf of the Library's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) to hire 1 FTE to design and support the systems needed to implement the program.

In addition to the initiatives outlined above, CRS's priorities for fiscal 2025 include hosting a successful New Member Seminar in January 2025 for the newly elected Members of the 119th Congress; continuing efforts to strengthen the diversity and inclusiveness of its workforce and working environment; and supporting continuous integration and development of a modernized IT infrastructure. As always, CRS will focus primarily on the delivery of timely, authoritative products, services and programming tailored to meet the needs of the 119th Congress.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The program increases requested by CRS are key components of the Service's broader initiative to explore innovative approaches to enhance its products and services and to ensure that Congress has access to the highest quality research, analysis, information, and expertise available. The following is a brief summary of CRS's progress in achieving these important objectives.

Interactive Graphics and Other Visually-Based Products

CRS is developing new, visually-based products through the efforts of its Data Visualization and GIS Section, within the Office of Publishing (PUB), and under the guidance and oversight of the Interactive Graphics Working Group (IGWG). During the past year, the IGWG has worked to streamline the production of such products, address technical issues that arise, facilitate innovation in interactive displays, and expand interactive visual options. In addition, the Group has explored adaptation of content into interactive infographics within the CRS Insight product line; acquired additional libraries to support more 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 2024, CRS's product line includes 44 Infographics and 25 interactive graphics. CRS is also working on the prototype of a new "storymap" product, a next-generation storytelling platform that puts together multiple visual elements to create a narrative. These innovative products present exciting possibilities for CRS to present its research, analysis, and information to Congress in new, accessible, and user-friendly formats.

Workforce Recruitment and Retention

CRS continues to recruit, retain, and professionally develop a diverse, highly skilled workforce. During fiscal 2023, CRS developed 100 recruitment plans for merit selection positions, and attended over 20 recruiting events, many of which were sponsored by minority-serving institutions and organizations with a focus on underrepresented groups. 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. The Service also supported several

paid summer internship opportunities through the Student Diversity and Inclusion Internship Program. Updates on diversity and inclusion efforts are communicated to staff through messages from leadership, CRS's staff newsletter, and the Service's internal Diversity and Inclusion website.

Exploring Artificial Intelligence Applications

Under the guidance of the CRS AIWG (noted above), CRS has initiated a number of AI related activities including: the launch of an Artificial Intelligence Research Portal to provide resources for CRS staff related to the field of AI; evaluation of new, generative AI components of a commercial legal research database; the development of an internal inventory of potential use cases for incorporating AI into the work of the Service; and the issuance of guidance to CRS staff prohibiting the use of Chat GPT or other AI tools in their work for Congress without prior CRS or Library approval.

In collaboration with the Library's OCIO, CRS is also exploring the utilization of automated processes to expedite drafting, reviewing, and publishing of bill summaries and the assignment of geographic and organizational subject terms. These activities involve the evaluation of models and methods using generative AI, traditional AI/Machine Learning, and Natural Language Processing tools, and assessment to identify baseline expectations for acceptable accuracy rates, objectivity, and performance standards for machine-generated summaries and subject terms.

IT Modernization/Integrated Research and Information Systems (IRIS)

CRS continues to work with the Library's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) to modernize its IT infrastructure with the deployment of new tools and software to enhance support to congressional stakeholders. The Integrated Research and Information System (IRIS) initiative is a multi-year effort to update the Service's mission-specific information technology to provide CRS staff with the best resources to create and deliver products and services to Congress.

Several applications have been successfully deployed to CRS users. The Minerva request management application was released to users in the fourth quarter of fiscal 2023; updates and enhancements continue monthly. In addition, the Text Analysis Program (TAP) for supporting bill summaries and bill comparisons was released in the second quarter of fiscal 2024. CRS and OCIO are continuing to execute several additional work streams to include CRS.gov website redesign with an enhanced taxonomy and new search capability, authoring and document management, and content management. CRS anticipates a release of the newly redesigned CRS.gov website that includes an enhanced taxonomy and a new search capability early in the fourth quarter.

Technical solutions have been designed and adapted to maintain alignment with Library of Congress and Legislative Branch cloud strategies. Projects are currently proceeding consistent with contractual requirements, schedules, and resources. Solutions are being informed by both internal CRS staff as well as congressional stakeholders. These efforts are essential to modernizing CRS mission-critical applications, to achieve the Library's "digital first" strategy and meet the growing needs of the Congress, in the areas of information research, policy and data analysis, content creation, and product delivery.

Congress.gov

The United States House of Representatives and Senate produce, and own, the data that is accessible to Members of Congress, legislative agencies, and the general public from Congress.gov. This fiscal year marks an historic, behind-the-scenes accomplishment for authoritative information provided by

our data partners. First generation, 30–40-year-old out-of-date systems and workflows are being retired.

The Library, including CRS, has worked closely with House and Senate data owners to incorporate data standards and best practices into the new systems and workflows that produce data for Congress.gov. Along with the Library, CRS is deeply appreciative for our data partners' initiatives 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 editing and publishing interoperability within the legislative ecosystem. Modernizing behind-the-scenes workflows advances our legislative data partnerships in support of better tracking legislative information and Member contributions through Congress.gov.

We are preparing for the future, and continue to bring historical materials into Congress.gov. To date, researchers can access more than 3.2 million historical and contemporary items from Congress.gov. We remain committed to working with our data partners, including the House Clerk, 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 for Congress of the U.S. Constitution's interpretation. In 2019, CRS collaborated with OCIO and the Law Library to introduce a website for CONAN: constitution.congress.gov. The site features hundreds of pages of updated constitutional analysis and content. During fiscal year 2023, CRS legal staff 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, new and existing content has been drafted and revised in the form of short, granular essays that focus on specific, discrete topics. CRS legal staff have also begun the organizational work to begin preparing the printed pocket parts to the decennial 2022 edition of CONAN, unless a legislative fix obviates the need to continue to produce hardbound and print publications of CONAN. Since the launch of the public website in 2019, CONAN online has received more than fifty million views and has served as a valuable reference source for Congress and the public.

CRS has requested a legislative change to eliminate the requirement to produce the hardbound version of CONAN, which is quickly outdated, and rely exclusively on the CONAN website, which provides timely updates.

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. CRS staff utilize the Research Portal, which is available on the Service's intranet, as a hub for digital resources. It provides staff with quick and easy access to information needed to research, analyze, and advise on legislative issues. By the end of fiscal 2023, CRS staff had access to 46 research portal sites. The Service sponsored multiple activities to facilitate the sharing of information, knowledge, and best practices and enable staff to learn from one another's experiences including quarterly Knowledge Café's, an annual Summer Series on emerging technologies, and communities of practice such as the SharePoint Users Group. In addition, CRS continued its efforts to improve its onboarding and

offboarding procedures to ensure the timely transfer of knowledge held by senior analysts, attorneys, and information professionals.

Access to Executive Branch Information
In addition to the legislative change regarding CONAN (see above), CRS has requested a legislative change to improve access to executive branch information, which will enable the Service to respond to requests from and provide products to Members and their staff in a more timely and authoritative manner.

SERVICE TO CONGRESS
As in previous years, CRS provided support to almost every Member and committee office in fiscal 2023. CRS experts responded to over 76,000 congressional requests; prepared nearly 1,200 new products; and updated over 1,800 existing products. The Service posted 117 new videos to CRS.gov and published 36 podcasts on a variety of topics including: the Metaverse, judicial conduct, the executive budget process, federal research and development (R&D) funding, defense topics, the role of the federal government in redistricting, and Medicare drug prices.

In fiscal 2023, CRS experts provided extensive support to Members, committees, and congressional staff on a wide range of legal and public policy issues including: defense budgets and operations; energy supply and security; regulation of the financial sector; border security and immigration; tax and fiscal policy; the war in Ukraine; and US-China relations. CRS legislative attorneys advised congressional clients on the implications of recent Supreme Court opinions; and on legal questions associated with the termination of the COVID-19 public health emergency declarations; federal antitrust enforcement actions against large technology companies, social media regulation; and intellectual property and privacy concerns raised by artificial intelligence technology. In addition, CRS analysts and attorneys provided testimony before congressional committees on issues related to federal contracting; social security; strategic competition in the arctic; congressional oversight; and seating a delegate of the Cherokee Nation in the House of Representatives. CRS also continued to provide guidance on questions regarding legislative and budget process, congressional oversight, and the annual appropriations bills.

During fiscal 2023, CRS hosted a variety of seminars and programs for Members and staff including its annual Issues and Policies seminar; a Legislative and Budget Process Institute; a series on legal research; and the biennially scheduled Federal Law Update series. The Service also conducted sessions on FEMA disaster assistance; cybersecurity and infrastructure security; and seminar series on issues related to financial services; disruptive technology; COVID 19; and defense. In addition, CRS successfully launched its Congressional Legal Education Forum (CLEF), a program that provides congressional staff a foundational legal education in matters relevant to Congress's legislative and oversight functions. In total, CRS conducted over 300 seminars that were attended by approximately 13,000 congressional participants.

CONCLUSION
Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the Subcommittee, the initiatives noted in today's testimony, reflect CRS's ongoing commitment to enhance its product and service offerings to meet Congress's diverse and evolving needs and to do so as comprehensively and efficiently as possible. CRS values its role as Congress's trusted resource and is committed to providing exceptional research, analysis, and information to meet the needs of every Member and

committee. On behalf of my colleagues at CRS, I would like to express my appreciation to the Committee for your continued support and for your consideration of CRS's fiscal 2025 request.