

The Honorable Mark Takano
41st District, California
Committee on House Administration
HR 4426 The Office of Technology Assessment
Improvement and Enhancement Act

Chairperson Lofgren, Vice Chairperson Raskin, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I'm here to advocate for the reestablishment of the Office of Technology Assessment and for a hearing on HR 4426, the Office of Technology Assessment Improvement and Enhancement Act, a bipartisan, bicameral bill I introduced with Representative Foster and Senators Tillis and Hirono in September that would modernize the way in which a reconstituted OTA would operate. I want to thank Vice Chair Raskin for his support of the bill.

The foundation for good policy is accurate and objective analysis, and for more than two decades, the OTA set that foundation by providing relevant, unbiased technical and scientific assessments for Members of Congress and staff.

But in 1995, the Office of Technology Assessment was defunded, stripping Congress of a valuable resource.

Congress has an important role to play in making sure that the benefits of advances in science and technology are distributed equally throughout our society and that the potential harms are mitigated. In order to do this, we need to strengthen our capacity to understand emerging technology and its social and policy implications.

There is wide agreement within Congress and among our external stakeholders that Congress needs access to unbiased technological expertise to weigh the pros and cons of policy questions surrounding current and emerging technology issues including cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and many more matters.

The challenge is in determining how Congress can best gain access to and utilize this expertise.

Last year, appropriators funded the Congressional Research Service to work with the National Academy on Public Administration to conduct a report on current science and technology resources available to Congress and recommend options for enhancing these resources.

We agree with the NAPA report's assessment of the needs of Congress and with their determination that restoring the OTA would be highly desirable. However we disagree with their conclusions that restoring the OTA is not viable and that the Government Accountability Office can meet Congress's tech assessment needs.

In 2002, GAO began conducting technology assessments. More recently, GAO received funding to establish the Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics team, otherwise known as S-T-A-A. While GAO does great work, the inadequate policy responses to emerging technology issues, the continued calls from Members and staff on both sides of the aisle to restore the OTA, and the \$6 million in the FY20 House Appropriations bill to restore the OTA demonstrate that GAO hasn't and won't be able to fully address Congress's needs.

And this is not just a numbers issue. Even with increased staffing, GAO is not well-suited to anticipate issues or identify future trends. Nor is it responsive and accessible to all Members.

There is a clear need for the forward-looking approach of OTA to complement the work of GAO and CRS. There is also room to improve on and modernize the OTA to address its past criticisms and enable it to better meet our current needs.

Among concerns I've heard are that the OTA was not responsive to all Members and that it did not always maintain a fresh approach. Our bill envisions a modernized OTA that is responsive to all Members of Congress and provides short-term technical expertise while maintaining the forward-looking assessment work OTA was known for. Our bill includes a rotator program to bring in experts from academia and industry, ensuring a steady flow of cutting-edge expertise.

We propose calling this rebooted office the Congressional Office of Technology, emphasizing its position as an essential tool of Congress.

An updated technology assessment office, like the proposed Congressional Office of Technology in my legislation, would combine deep technical expertise and robust forward-looking reports with the ability to be responsive to the immediate questions and needs of Members and staff.

These needs will inevitably continue to arise as Congress responds to rapid changes in technology.

As we continue to seek new and innovative ways to modernize Congress, restoring the OTA and making it more responsive, accessible, and transparent is an important means through which we can ensure Congress has the tools it needs to respond to the unique challenges of our time. This is an important strategic investment in our institution's capacity to create technology policy that protects our constituents while encouraging innovation.

I urge you to support HR 4426 and to hold a hearing on expanding science and technology capacity in Congress. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I yield the balance of my time.