

Testimony of Melissa Medina, CEO of TourTrackr (Owned by AppMy, LLC)
Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
Hearing on “Congress & Technology: Modernizing the Innovation Cycle”
Thursday, June 23, 2022 at 9am ET

Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and Members of the Select Committee, I am honored to appear today to testify. Customer focused innovative technologies have advanced, yet many everyday Congressional constituent services are managed manually. Member offices can benefit from facilitating a more transparent and welcoming technology startup ecosystem on Capitol Hill for new tech products.

Like many in this room, I came to Washington D.C. over a decade ago to make a difference.

Prior to launching TourTrackr, the tour management platform used by nearly 100 Member Offices to organize constituent tour requests, I started my career as a staffer on Capitol Hill - first working for Representative Ed Royce’s DC personal office and then the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Next I co-launched the Congressional App Challenge, the district-wide competition for middle school and high school students that encourages them to learn to code and inspires them to pursue careers in computer science. Additionally, I created CONGRESS\$ - a YouTube Series focused on providing personal finance tips to Congressional staff. Based on my experience as a former staffer and now tech entrepreneur, I am uniquely positioned to identify the challenges and opportunities of growth related to tech innovation in Congress.

When I first started on Capitol Hill in 2011 as a staff assistant, I remember processing many constituent services manually. From constituent tour requests to flown flag purchases, these important responsibilities were tracked using printouts, binders and excel spreadsheets. It was a fragmented, inefficient process. At the time, there were no digital alternatives that House offices were approved to use. So while these tasks seemed easy, they were tedious, repetitive and time consuming.

Fast forward to nearly a decade later, despite the advancements made in commercial technology, most House offices were still processing administrative work (such as tours and flags) manually - pretty much the same way I was doing it years prior! Seeing a market opportunity, I set out to create a product that I wish existed during my time - a platform that would simplify and digitize the Congressional tour process.

Planning DC tours is a great constituent service that allows you as Members to connect directly with the people you serve when they fly to our nation’s Capitol. Prior to COVID, managing tour requests took anywhere between 12-20 hours a week depending on the district. Imagine managing a couple hundred or few thousand tour requests for multiple DC government sites that

only Congressional offices can book. By developing a tech solution, my goal was to allow staffers to improve the quality of constituent engagement while minimizing administrative tasks so they can do what they came to Washington D.C. to do - effect change.

Working on a new start-up company already faces hurdles. The added House complexities (such as the lack of new vendor support and lack of information in navigating how to sell to Congressional offices) made establishing a needed tech product difficult - even for someone who understood how Congress operates. The closed nature of the House creates restrictive barriers that ultimately decrease competition and prevent new technologies from succeeding.

I respect and understand that the House has high standards for new tech approval. Protecting security and personal identifiable information (PII) are critical to ensure the integrity of the institution. That said, upholding those priorities and creating a welcoming environment for new tech products can be done simultaneously. Through my experience, some opportunities for change the Select Committee can investigate include:

Transparency:

- To diversify access, it would be helpful for the House to develop a process for evaluating and working with small businesses, vendors and start-ups.
- To get a wider range of new product offerings, it would be great if the House allowed new companies or vendors to submit unsolicited tech proposals for review and approval.
- To eliminate information asymmetry, there should be a clearly defined process (including feedback and tracking) along with outlined requirements that provide a roadmap for new submissions while maintaining security protocols and structures.

Support:

- To reduce confusion, the House should designate a point of contact for these new tech submissions so that submitting entities know where they are in the process.

Streamline:

- To maximize efficiency, the House may want to consider working with the Senate to align their approval standards and processes for new vendors.

Thank you for all the work the Select Committee has done to bring innovation to the Halls of Congress. It is my hope that these suggestions pave the way for more efficient, creative and innovative solutions that make a difference ultimately improving Member office operations and constituent services.

I look forward to answering your questions, and to continuing the discussion with the Select Committee.