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CONGRESS BACK HOME: MODERNIZING DISTRICT OFFICE OPERATIONS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS

OF THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

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CONGRESS BACK HOME: MODERNIZING DISTRICT OFFICE OPERATIONS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 12:01 p.m., via Zoom, Hon. Derek Kilmer [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Kilmer, Cleaver, Perlmutter, Williams, Timmons, Van Duyne, and Joyce.

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

Okay. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

Today's hearing is titled, "Congress Back Home," because that is what our district offices are. Our district staff are on the front lines day in and day out, helping our constituents so that they can navigate the complexities of the Federal Government from cities and towns all over the country. It is incredibly challenging work, and I know we are all grateful for the dedication and commitment of our staffs to serving the American people. We could not do our jobs in Washington without support from back home, which is why we need to make certain that our district offices and staff have the resources that they need to be successful.

Staff have told us that up-to-date equipment and infrastructure are essential, as are clear policies and guidelines. They need seamless access to the same services, benefits, and training available to D.C. staff. I know Congress is making progress on this front, and I would like to acknowledge the good work that the CAO's coaches are doing in partnering with district offices.

We also know that district staff do highly specialized work, and that is why it is so important to seek their expertise and feedback in an ongoing way. The casework they manage on behalf of our constituents is often complex and requires a detailed understanding of agency processes and procedures. And this work is made more difficult when there is little consistency across agencies in terms of how inquiries are handled.

So, our goal today is to learn about what we can do to make the lives of our district staff easier so that they can better serve our constituents. And what better way to do that than going straight to the source, because committee staff have been holding listening

sessions with district directors, two of whom are joining us today, and will continue to incorporate their insights into our work.

Even though we are meeting virtually today, we are going to use the committee rules we adopted late last year that give us more flexibility in the Q&A portion of the hearing. Our goal, as always, is just to encourage thoughtful discussion and the civil exchange of ideas and opinions. So, here goes.

In accordance with clause 2(j) of House rule XI, we will allow up to 30 minutes of extended questioning per witness, and, without objection, time will not be strictly segregated between the witnesses, which will allow for extended back and forth exchanges between members and the witnesses. Vice Chair Timmons and I will manage the time to ensure that every member has equal opportunity to participate. Any member who wishes to speak should just raise their virtual hand, and either I or Vice Chair Timmons will make sure you can jump in.

Additionally, members who wish to claim their individual 5 minutes to question each witness pursuant to clause 2(j)(2) of rule XI will be permitted to do so following the period of extended questioning.

All right. With that, I would like to invite Vice Chair Timmons to share some opening remarks as well.

Mr. TIMMONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We are joined by a very special panel of witnesses today. To be sure, it is unusual to have current staff testify at a House hearing, but who better to hear from on how we as an institution can better serve our constituents than those who are on the front lines doing just that every day.

In that vein, I believe our witnesses today have almost 50 years of combined service between them. I want to thank each of you for your service, not just to the institution itself, but more importantly, to the people we represent.

And as you probably know, a big focus of our committee has been and continues to be improving staff capacity. In other words, how do we recruit talented staff to serve, and just as important, how do we keep them here so we maintain that experience and that institutional knowledge, which makes the House stronger and improve our work on behalf of the American people.

And I know that is not the topic of today's hearing, but clearly, the offices where you have worked have done something right. So perhaps we can take some time after our hearing concludes today to get your recommendations on that front as well.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to thank you and I want to thank Congressman Perlmutter for the passion behind this issue. I have had challenges getting my district offices up to date. I inherited two district offices in different parts of my district, and then we combined them to one. And, you know, there is cost savings there, there are efficiencies there, but it took us 11 months to get internet. It literally took us 11 months to get internet.

So, you know, we all have our stories of the challenges of setting up new offices, and I look forward to learning the best practices and how we can improve Congress as a whole to better serve the American people. I will give you all one example. We do not—passports are obviously a huge issue, and we are creating an online por-

tal to shepherd the constituents to to expedite that process as opposed to them calling me and texting me and emailing me. So, you know, there are just so many efficiencies that we can have everywhere. And if anybody on this call has not gotten their passport renewed, please do it now. That would be great.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you so much.

The CHAIRMAN. Good advice. Good advice. Thank you, Vice Chair Timmons.

I am pleased to welcome our witnesses who are here to share their thoughts about what Congress can do to modernize district office operations. I also want to note that two of our witnesses today run the district offices for two of our committee members, Mr. Perlmutter and Mr. Reschenthaler. We did some research, and as far as we can tell, this is the first time staff have testified to their own bosses, so another first for the Modernization Committee.

Witnesses are reminded that your written statements will be made part of the record.

So our first witness is Danielle Radovich Piper. Ms. Piper serves as Representative Ed Perlmutter's chief of staff and is based out of his district office. She previously worked in the Colorado State legislature and was the chief of staff for the State senate majority office. Prior to that, she was a senior associate for a public affairs firm. She earned her bachelor's of arts in political science from Colorado State University. And for working with Mr. Perlmutter, she has earned our undying gratitude and sympathy, really. He has got to be really challenging to work with, but we are grateful that you are taking time out and hopefully getting hazard pay for your work with Ed.

But, with that, Ms. Piper, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENTS OF DANIELLE RADOVICH PIPER, ON THE BEHALF OF THE OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN ED PERLMUTTER (D–CO); SARAH YOUNGDAHL, ON THE BEHALF OF THE OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN GUY RESCHENTHALER (R–PA); AND GEORGE HADIJSKI, ON THE BEHALF OF THE CONGRESSIONAL MANAGEMENT FOUNDATION

STATEMENT OF DANIELLE RADOVICH PIPER

Ms. RADOVICH PIPER. Thank you.

Good afternoon, Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chairman Timmons, members of the committee, staff, and my boss. My name is Danielle Radovich Piper. I am chief of staff to Congressman Ed Perlmutter, Colorado 7. I have had the pleasure of serving in my capacity as chief of his staff since January of 2007, and I have the unique perspective of being based in the district office since first opening our offices.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee regarding modernizing district office procedures. I would like to begin my remarks by praising the creation of the CAO Coach Program. Since its inception last summer, the CAO Coach, in my opinion, is by far the most helpful and informative program the House has stood up in my 15 years on the Hill.

Additionally, the trainings and briefings provided for staff through the staff academy are a tremendous opportunity to provide

staff with professional trainings for on and off Hill work. I sincerely hope this committee and all Members of the House will continue to support the CAO Coach Program, and I encourage its future growth.

Over the years, our district office, like many others, has grappled with technological challenges, antiquated House and agency systems, and confusion regarding the use of the appropriate House support offices. Regardless of these challenges, we found a way to make it work, to provide the best service possible to our constituents. However, I believe many of these problems can be solved if we reduce barriers and modernize systems.

A significant technological challenge for us is the speed at which our office accesses and transmits electronic information. We tried many fixes over the years to the problem, from rewiring to purchasing our own server, neither of which alleviated the problem. The main issue is the House firewall and the need for data to travel to and from D.C. with every click, which is slow, resulting in loss to staff time and less productivity. One solution is to allow offices to use a secure cloud system, thus removing the obstacle of the time it takes for the data to travel back and forth.

Another problem for district offices is the lack of WiFi capability. Since the House does not support WiFi in district offices, we resort to workarounds such as the use of hotspots. As we all experienced with the pandemic, having access to WiFi is critical for a fully functioning office and would provide staff more flexibility to be more mobile within the office workspace.

Next, I would like to offer several thoughts regarding casework and the interaction with agencies.

The digital privacy release forms. Not all agencies use digital forms which would enable casework in these high–volume issue areas to be less cumbersome, tedious, and time consuming for both staff and the constituents.

Faxes. Not all agencies have gone digital, and some still use the fax. We recommend the elimination of faxes across all agencies.

Agency contact lists. CRS provides a helpful agency guide, but it only has one point of contact for each agency, and all are located in D.C. Casework teams require a list of local field offices within each agency's region, including contact names, numbers, and emails.

Service academy applications. Automating our application system in 2011 was incredibly helpful to us and it significantly cut down on the administrative time it took to process applications. We recommend CMS vendors establishing a template for the use for all offices.

CRS inquiry reports. Standardizing these reports across all agencies would reduce confusion, increase staff efficiencies, and ultimately result in better outcomes for the constituent.

As previously mentioned, standing up the CAO Coach Program is a tremendous tool for us and, coupled with a customer advocate assigned to each office, has streamlined communications and helped to clear up some confusion regarding the CAO and the services they provide. I hope this program will be highlighted during new Member orientation and that each new Member and their des-

ignated staffer will have the opportunity to meet one on one with their customer advocate.

Lastly, I would like to take a moment to highlight several events I hope the House will continue to support. We participate in each of these events, and they all contribute greatly to the lives of our constituents and our community.

The first is the Vietnam pinning program. Established in 2007 by an act of Congress and a subsequent Presidential proclamation, the lapel pins were created to honor veterans who served during the Vietnam war. These ceremonies were more successful than we ever imagined. Our first one was held on March 24, 2017, and since that time, we have held eight pinning ceremonies, honoring more than 900 Colorado Vietnam-era veterans.

The second is the Veterans History Project. We launched the program in our office in 2007, and produced, in conjunction with local schools, four feature-length films and several other smaller interviews with dozens of veterans serving in Iwo Jima to Vietnam to the Gulf war.

The third is the Congressional Art Show. We have participated in the art show nearly every year since 2007, and have worked with hundreds of students to display their creations in our district and in the halls of Congress. Many of these students are alternative learners, and the program provides these young people, in many cases, with an experience they would not otherwise be afforded.

Lastly, the STEM App Challenge is another favorite of our office. However, it could be improved with allowing offices more flexibility to hold these events during a time of year which works best for the office and the schools.

So, thank you, Mr. Chair, Vice Chair, members, and staff, for taking the time to hear my testimony today. I hope the committee finds my thoughts helpful as you work toward modernizing House procedures. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

[The statement of Ms. Radovich Piper follows:]

Testimony of Danielle Radovich Piper
Chief of Staff to Representative Ed Perlmutter, CO-07
Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
Congress Back Home: Modernizing District Office Operations
February 16, 2022

Good afternoon, Chairman Kilmer, Vice-Chairman Timmons, Members of the Committee and staff. My name is Danielle Radovich Piper, I am Chief of Staff to Congressman Ed Perlmutter, CO-07. I have had the pleasure of serving in my capacity as Chief of Staff since January of 2007, and I have the unique perspective of being based in the District Office since first opening our offices. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding modernizing district office procedures.

I would like to begin my remarks by praising the creation of the CAO Coach Program. Since its inception last summer, the CAO Coach, in my opinion, is by far the most helpful and informative program the House has stood up in my 15 years on the Hill. Additionally, the trainings and briefings provided for staff through the Staff Academy are insightful, relevant and a tremendous opportunity to provide staff with professional trainings for on and off the Hill work. I sincerely hope this Committee and all Members of the House will continue to support the CAO Coach Program and encourage its future growth.

Over the years our district office, like many others, has grappled with technological challenges, antiquated House/Agency systems and confusion regarding the use of the appropriate House support office depending on our need at any given time. Regardless of these challenges we found a way to make it work to provide the best service possible to our constituents. However, I believe many of these problems can be solved if we reduce barriers and modernize systems.

I will begin with a few of the technological challenges we have experienced. Over the years our district office has grappled with the speed at which our office accesses and

transmits electronic information. We tried many fixes to the problem from re-wiring to purchasing our own server, neither of which alleviated the problem. The main issue is the House firewall and the need for data to travel to and from DC with every click, thus causing a slow network resulting in lost staff time and less productivity. One solution is to allow offices to use a secure Cloud system thus removing the obstacle of the time it takes for data to travel back and forth. Another problem for district offices is the lack of WiFi capability. Since the House does not support WiFi in district offices we resort to work-a-arounds such as the use of hot spots. As we all experienced with the pandemic, having access to WiFi is critical for a fully functioning office and would provide staff more flexibility to be more mobile within the office workspace.

Next, I would like to offer several thoughts regarding casework and the interaction with agencies.

- Digital Privacy Release forms:
    - There needs to be a consistent use of this form across all agencies. USCIS and the Passport Office are the only two agencies that do not allow the use of a digital signature. It makes the casework in these high-volume issue areas more cumbersome, tedious and time consuming for both staff and the constituent.
    - Moving to digital privacy release forms significantly cut down on administrative time for staff in submitting inquiries.
- Faxes:
    - Not all agencies have 'gone digital' and some still use the fax. Eliminating the use of the fax across all agencies is another example that would greatly increase the productivity of the casework team and their ability to serve constituents in a timely manner.
- Agency contact lists:
    - CRS provides a helpful agency guide, but it only has one point of contact for each agency and all are located in DC. Casework teams require a list of the local field offices within each agency's region which includes contact names, phone numbers and email addresses. Social Security, for example, provides a spreadsheet of all their field offices, which includes manager phone numbers and email addresses.
- Service Academy applications:
    - Automating our application system in 2011 was incredibly helpful to us and it significantly cut down on the administrative time it took to process applications. However, we understand many offices struggle with automating this process without help from a vendor. One idea for the House or CMS providers to consider is creating a template for offices to use. This would eliminate the need for offices to use an outside vendor such as Jotform which is an additional cost to the office.

- CRS inquiry reports:
    - Standardizing these reports across all agencies would reduce confusion, increase staff efficiencies, and ultimately result in better outcomes for the constituent.

As I mentioned earlier in this testimony, standing up the CAO Coach Program is a tremendous tool for us coupled with each office having a customer advocate has helped streamline communications and clear up some confusion regarding the CAO. I hope this program will be highlighted and reiterated during new member orientation and that each new member and their designated staffer will have the opportunity to meet one on one with their customer advocate. New member orientation for me was overwhelming and at times confusing so I would have appreciated the ability to go to one person with questions rather than sifting through a document of people all of whom perform different duties that I wasn't yet familiar.

Lastly, I would like to take a moment to highlight several events I hope the House will continue to support. We participate in each of these events, and they all contribute greatly to the lives of our constituents and our community.

The first is the Vietnam pinning program. Established in 2007 by an Act of Congress and a subsequent presidential proclamation, the United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration started with a presidential event at the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial on May 28, 2012, and will run through Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2025. The lapel pins were created to recognize, thank and honor veterans who served during the Vietnam War. These ceremonies were more successful than we ever imagined. Our first pinning ceremony was held on March 24, 2017, and since that time we have held eight pinning ceremonies honoring more than 900 Colorado Vietnam-era Veterans.

The second is the Veterans History Project. We launched the program in our office in 2007 and produced in conjunction with local community colleges and high schools 4 feature-length films and several other smaller interviews where we interviewed dozens of Veterans serving in many different theaters around the world from Iwo Jima to Vietnam to the Gulf War.

The third is the Congressional Art Show. We have participated in the Art Show nearly every year since 2007 and have worked with hundreds of students to display their creations in our district and in the halls of congress. Many of these students are alternative learners and the program provides these young people, in many cases, with an experience they would not otherwise be afforded.

Lastly, the STEM App Challenge is another favorite of our office.
However, it could be improved with allowing offices more flexibility in hosting the event. Specifically, the event is normally held in the Fall, but for us it works better for our

school districts to hold the event in the Spring. We have higher participation at that time which results in a better more robust event.

Thank you Mr. Chair, Vice-Chair, Members and staff for taking the time to hear my testimony today. I hope the Committee finds my thoughts helpful as you work toward modernizing House procedures. I look forward to answering your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Piper. You got applause from your boss. That is a good sign.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Yay. Yay.

The Chairman. Our next witness is Sarah Youngdahl. And before I formally introduce Ms. Youngdahl, I would like to read a short statement from Mr. Reschenthaler.

He wrote: Although I could not attend today's hearing due to a previous scheduling conflict, I wanted to provide this statement welcoming and thanking my district director, Sarah Youngdahl, for testifying on this important topic.

He writes: Sarah started working in my Pennsylvania State senate office in 2017, where she served as event coordinator. After election to Congress, Sarah joined my team as district administrator, and has since been promoted to district director. Sarah is a lifelong resident of western Pennsylvania and a tremendous asset to my office. Thank you for allowing Sarah to testify today, and I look forward to working with the committee to modernize district office operations.

That, Sarah, may be better than any introduction I could give you, so I want to thank Mr. Reschenthaler for that statement. And, Ms. Youngdahl, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF SARAH YOUNGDAHL

Ms. YOUNGDAHL. Thank you so much.

Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and members of the committee, thank you for having me testify today. As the district director for Congressman Guy Reschenthaler, I am honored to share my experience and insight to help better operations in congressional districts across the country.

My tenure with Congressman Reschenthaler began during his time in the State senate, and then transitioned to his congressional staff in 2019. It was evident from day one that it would be a challenge to establish offices for a freshman Congressman.

Pennsylvania was in a unique position from the beginning. The State had just gone through a nondecennial redistricting. Happening outside the normal timeline, there was much confusion regarding offices start-up. We did not have the luxury to receive guidance from the outgoing Member or their staff. We would have to rely on our own experiences and instinct as we found no person or entity to guide us through this process.

The following are some of my recommendations to make the new office process smoother, and once in the office, operations as streamlined as possible.

Selection for a brand new office in a newly established district is challenging when there is uncertainty about finding the best-suited location, necessary office amenities, or acceptable and available furnishing. While the House Ethics provided general internet needs, pricing allowances, and the lease information, most basic logistics lacked guidance. Should a new office be established near other government buildings; should consideration be given to available security or safety features; is it more feasible to have separate staff offices; should a conference room area be considered, are all questions facing a new director.

Freedom should be given to each office to fit their needs, but information of what those needs may or may not be would be critical in making the first decisions of the office and alleviate possible issues in the future.

There are major differences as to how the flagship or the main office is to be set up versus a satellite office. Having one office designated as the main site gave us little decisionmaking for its set up. Everything from the internet to the phone contracts were made for us. While this was a welcome assistance, a satellite office requires staff to not only determine the needs but also contact a provider and oversee the installation. Due to differing providers, office staff, not the House technical staff, was also contacting providers to repair, maintain, or replace equipment or service as time goes on. Finances are separate for the multiple district offices, but the setup should be more connected when those offices in the end need the same thing.

It was also found that transitioning constituent casework was more difficult than initially anticipated. Inquiries filed by the departing office became lost or delayed in processing at the Federal agency when the original office was no longer a proper contact. For many constituents, re-creating a previously filed inquiry delayed the receipt of Social Security or veterans benefits.

While understanding the need for separation of districts, having immediate access to casework and regional contacts with Federal agencies would allow staff to be better equipped to help new constituents from day one.

Over time, there has been an uptick in remote and alternate work for the district office and our Federal agency partners. While some accommodations were implemented, other issues were more complex and resulted in a slower response time. One suggestion to initiate quicker response times was to have digital signatures. This would eliminate the time-consuming printing, mailing, and returning of agency-required privacy forms. However, it was found that numerous agencies do not accept the digital format. A service that we would utilize to help constituents was not feasible due to the agency-placed limitations that we have been told should not exist.

Lastly, events throughout the district pose problems in working with other organizations. Often it is found that State and Federal agencies have their own set of guidelines and practices they must follow. We frequently shy away from doing events partnered with others due to differing ethics rules. Being provided clear guidance regarding ethical practices for these events would be helpful in planning.

For example, events targeting similar interested groups would make more sense done in conjunction with other agencies and organizations. While we can host and invite other groups, this causes limitations for everyone else in advertising and funding. There is also the possibility of constituents missing out on valuable resources and assistance if it is not all in one.

Thank you all for allowing me to shed light on my district experience and the challenges that have come up from the start of the office to today. I hope my recommendations will better operations for not only Members and staff but the constituents we serve. Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Youngdahl follows:]

Sarah Youngdahl

Testimony

District Director for Congressman Guy Reschenthaler (PA -14)

House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress

"Congress Back Home: Modernizing District Office Operations"

February 16, 2022

Chairman Kilmer, Vice-Chair Timmons, and Members of the Committee, thank you for having me testify today. As the District Director for Congressman Guy Reschenthaler, I am honored to share my experience and insight to help better operations in Congressional districts across the country.

My tenure with Congressman Reschenthaler began during his time in the State Senate and then transitioned to his Congressional Staff in 2019. It was evident from day one that it would be a challenge to establish offices for a freshman Congressman. Pennsylvania was in a unique position from the beginning because the state had just gone through a non-decennial redistricting. Happening outside the normal timeline, there was much confusion regarding offices start-up. We did not have the luxury to receive guidance from an outgoing member or their staff. We would have to rely on our own experience and instincts as we found no person or entity to guide us through this process. The following are my recommendations to make the new office process smoother for not only new offices, but offices that are coming into newly formed districts.

Provide guidance in choosing an office location

Selection for a brand new office in a newly established district is challenging when there is uncertainty about finding the best-suited location, necessary office amenities, or acceptable and available furnishings. While the House Ethics provided general internet needs, pricing allowances, and the lease, most basic logistics lacked guidance. Should a new office be established near other government buildings; should consideration be given to available security or safety features; is it more feasible to have separate staff offices; should a conference room area be considered are all questions facing a new director. Freedom should be given to each office to fit their needs but information of what those needs may or may not be would be critical in making the first decisions of the office and alleviate possible issues in the future.

Breakdown of technology set up

In a new office, one of the biggest hurdles we encountered regarding the installation of technology was disseminating between the multiple sources offering contrasting views on what was needed and how it should be installed; there is no one-stop-shop. In many cases, the guidance was sometimes confusing. Although familiar with technological systems, their installation, and their use, I found the process to establish service to be both cumbersome and complicated. Acronyms are used excessively, which can be very confusing without proper explanations. Definition of terms like WAN and flagship are just some that we had to decipher on our own. If given a breakdown of what each term or contact is; time would be saved from jumping around to the wrong resources.

Streamline the Flagship and Satellite office decisions into one

There are major differences as to how the flagship—or main office—is to be set up versus a satellite office. Having one office designated as the main site gave us little decision-making for its setup. Everything from the internet to the phone contracts was made for us. While this was a welcome assistance, a satellite office requires staff to not only determine the needs, but also contact a provider and oversee the installation. Due to differing providers, office staff – not the House technical staff - must contact providers to repair, maintain, or replace equipment or service. Finances are separate for the multiple district offices but the set up should be more connected when both offices, in the end, need the same thing.

Allow agencies and outgoing offices to pass along cases to new offices

It was found that transitioning constituent casework was more difficult than initially anticipated. Inquiries filed by the departing office became lost or delayed in processing at the federal agency when the original office was no longer a proper contact. For many constituents, recreating a previously filed inquiry delayed the receipt of Social Security or Veteran benefits. While understanding the need for separation of districts, having immediate access to casework and regional contacts for the federal agencies would allow staff to be better equipped to help new constituents.

These challenges when opening an office would be alleviated with more communication and direct outreach from knowledgeable established House staff from the beginning of the office. Once the office is open, we have come across other challenges that make day to day operations more difficult than necessary.

Technology partners and Federal agencies need an agreement for digital signatures

Over time, there has been an uptick in remote and alternate office work for the district office and our federal agency partners. While some accommodations were implemented, other issues were more complex and resulted in a slower response time. One suggestion to initiate quicker response times was to have digital signatures. This would eliminate the time-consuming mailing, printing, and returning of agency-required privacy forms. However, it was found that numerous agencies do not accept the digital format. A service that we would utilize to help constituents was not feasible due to the agency placed limitations that we have been told should not exist.

Clear guidelines for partnership with other government and non-governmental organizations

Events throughout the district pose problems when working with other entities. Often, it is found that state and federal agencies have their own set of guidelines and practices. We frequently shy away from participating in events due to differing ethics rules. Clearer guidance regarding ethical practices for these events would be helpful. For example, events targeting similar interested groups would make more sense done in conjunction with other agencies and organizations. While we can host and invite other groups this causes limitations for everyone else in advertising and funding.

Make DC resources and opportunities available to District staff

While technology has made the DC to district disconnect less of an obstacle, there still seem to be areas that technology has not or cannot help. Amenities offered to DC employees are often not available to district staff. Examples like fitness center and childcare, while they are easily implemented on Capitol Hill, they still would be appreciated and utilized by district staffers. Many groups and organizations for professional development seem to be easily found and passed along to DC staff. These organizations sometimes find District staff but more often than not the connections aren't made quickly. These connections not only assist staff in their personal and professional lives, but they broaden their outreach.

Thank you for allowing me to shed light on district operations and the challenges that have come up from the start of the office to today.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks a bunch, Sarah. Also getting good applause from members of the committee.

Our final witness is George Hadijski. Did I get that right, George?

Mr. HADIJSKI. Yeah, that is correct.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. I am just going to skip it from here on out and call you George.

Mr. HADIJSKI. Good. That is perfect.

The CHAIRMAN. George is in charge of congressional programming at the Congressional Management Foundation. Prior to this, he served in the United States House of Representatives for 27 years, spending most of his career at the Committee on House Administration as director of Member and committee services and ending as a senior advisor. He earned his bachelor of arts in political science from the University of Miami.

Mr. Hadijski, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF GEORGE HADIJSKI

Mr. HADIJSKI. Good afternoon. I thank Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chairman Timmons, and the rest of the select committee, members and staff, for inviting me to speak.

First, let me say I am quite happy about the committee's focus on district offices, as they can many times be neglected when most of the legislative activity and focus is on Washington, D.C. In recent years, district staff have faced enormous challenges, as much of the work related in the pandemic fell on their shoulders with a groundswell of questions and casework from constituents. Anecdotally, CMF heard that total casework requests doubled in 2020 and 2021. It is these challenges that make for constructive lessons that would not only apply to the pandemic but also would be useful in future situations.

Today I will focus on three categories: staffing, security, and district office transitions.

In my experience, flexible policies can meet unexpected challenges and serve the institution best. Take, for example, how House Administration reconciled election year communication restrictions when faced with a district hit by a sudden natural disaster. House Administration modified the policy to allow Members to communicate information only related to the natural disaster to enable constituents to get vital assistance during the critical time. It is that lesson that I believe can apply to staffing.

Over the last several years, congressional offices struggled with how to manage their unanticipated surge of work in the district office. An office that was at the staff ceiling had few options other than reallocating D.C. staff to help relieve some of the load on the district staff. Instead, offices would be well served with the ability to hire additional personnel when they are confronted with a public emergency.

Currently, official allowance regulations provide for offices to hire temp agency personnel. However, those additional staff count towards the staff cap. It makes sense to examine a carveout to exempt temp agency staff during times of crisis. CMF has been an advocate for lifting the staff ceiling entirely and allowing Members to hire based on their office needs. But in the interim, I would rec-

ommend a measure that exempts offices temporarily from the staff cap in times of crisis. This change would help alleviate staff workload and could result in better constituent service.

Another area I would examine is casework. While this topic could fill a whole hearing, I will just focus on the concept of digitizing forms which has already been mentioned. The House previously reformed processes with the finance office, and I believe many of those principles can apply to casework.

Congressional staff spend significant time entering data and seeking privacy releases from constituents. Having the House or executive branch create a portal that is uniform that everybody can use where constituents can securely provide their information and digital signatures frees staff to focus more on engagement with agencies on behalf of their constituents.

The next area I will discuss is security for district offices. While security is not my expertise, I would have House Administration examine how security expenses are paid. Currently, many expenses are paid from the MRA, where Members are weighing budgetary constraints and needs against their office security needs. In the past, the House took steps to authorize central funding for certain district office expenses. I would recommend a process whereby security needs are entirely paid through a centralized funding mechanism instead of the MRA, with the appropriate oversight and signoff by House Administration.

The last area on which I will focus deals with how transitions take place. Currently, incoming members aren't allowed to expend funds for new district offices until the Congress begins, while D.C. offices begin their process in December. The result is D.C. offices are ready to go on day one, but district offices can take sometimes up to 2 months to be fully operational.

I would recommend that the House authorize paying for these setup expenses early to expedite the setup of district offices. It may require the House to engage in short-term leases to access the properties prior to swearing-in day. However, this would create a degree of parity between the two offices so they are both fully operational on January 3.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, and I have some other comments in my full statement and ask that the full statement be included for the record. And I thank the select committee for providing me the opportunity, and I am happy to answer any questions at the appropriate time.

[The statement of Mr. Hadijski follows:]

I thank Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chairman Timmons and the rest of the select committee members for inviting me to speak before you today. I spent the better part of my career–almost 30 years—working for the House of Representatives primarily at the Committee on House Administration. Currently, I work to assist and provide guidance to congressional offices through my position as the head of Congressional Programming for the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF).

First, let me say I'm quite happy about the Committee's focus on district offices, as they can many times be neglected and forgotten when most of the legislative activity and focus is on Washington D.C. Over the last several years, they have faced enormous challenges as much of the work related to the pandemic fell on the shoulders of the district staff to deal with a groundswell of pandemic-related questions and casework from constituents. Anecdotally, CMF has heard that total numbers of casework requests doubled in 2020 and 2021. Not surprisingly, CMF has found those offices that have the best dialogue and connections between their DC and district offices are typically the most successful and most well-managed offices, and they're usually the best suited to deal with unanticipated challenges because they are good at anticipating and planning in advance for contingencies.

It's these challenges that make for very constructive lessons learned that would not only apply to the pandemic but would be useful in any unanticipated situations moving forward. The areas on which I will focus break into three categories. They are: staffing; security; and transition and technology, particularly for freshman offices.

The lessons I learned from working all those years in Congress lead me to the conclusion that creating policies that are creative, flexible, and can meet unexpected challenges were always most likely to serve individual offices and the institution. One example of this was when the Committee on House Administration had to examine House communications policies during natural disasters. As you know, the House mandates certain communications functions be ceased running up to an election, so that incumbents do not have an unfair advantage in a campaign. However, what happens when a sudden natural disaster hits one or more districts during that time period? How do Members communicate with constituents vital public safety and resources information? At that time the Committee decided to modify the policy to allow Members to communicate specific information related to the natural disaster to enable constituents to get vital assistance and information during a critical time of need. It's that logic and lesson learned that I believe can apply to staffing.

Over the last several years, district staff have been met with unexpected challenges. In addition to their normal volume of constituent casework, offices fielded questions about pandemic assistance for families and workers and relief funding for small businesses trying to stay afloat. They were also dealing with supply needs for their first responders and hospitals having sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE). Congressional offices were forced to deal with the challenge of how to manage this unanticipated but urgent surge of work in the district office. If you're an office that is at full capacity or close to the cap, you had very few options other than reallocating your DC staff to help relieve some of the load on the district staff. It

became apparent that offices would be well served by having the ability to hire additional personnel when they are confronted with a public emergency.

Currently the Members' Representational Allowance (MRA) regulations that govern Representatives' personal office budgets provide for offices to hire temp agency personnel. However, those additional staff have counted towards the staff ceiling cap. It would make sense to examine a carve out to exempt temp agency staff during times of crisis. CMF has been an advocate of lifting the staff ceiling entirely and allowing Members to hire based on their office needs. The recent House Inspector General report also recommended an eventual removal of this staff ceiling cap. I would recommend having an interim measure that would exempt offices in times of crisis and provide for additional temporary employees during times of need as an interim step. This would alleviate the strains placed on the district staff during such times when phones may be ringing off the hook with requests for assistance. This crisis time period could still have limits, as it could be predicated on a formal determination by leadership or the Chair and Ranking Member of the House Administration Committee. CMF has also previously advocated the possibility of creating other exemptions to the staff ceiling for specific groups for which you would want greater representation such as interns, individuals who would fall under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), wounded veterans, etc. This may not be an easy task as it may require a statutory change, but it could be worthwhile for the institution and a win-win situation for everyone.

Also at issue during an emergency, but also a significant challenge to day to day operations of both Members and constituents, is the uneven access to mobile and broadband Internet. Though it may be outside the purview of this Committee, the fact that there are many areas of the country that still lack both reliable high, speed mobile and broadband Internet access significantly hinders representation, especially in large and at-large districts and those far from Washington, D.C. where it is difficult to reach all constituents physically. Especially during crisis, such as the pandemic that shut down travel and in-person meetings, and you leave a lot of Americans without access to necessary emergency information and services.

Another area I would recommend examining is casework. This topic could probably fill a whole hearing on its own, so I am just touching on the concept of digitization. The House has already started to digitize forms and processes with the finance office, and I believe many of those principles can apply to casework and should be examined as such. Currently, congressional staff are spending significant amounts of time entering information into forms and seeking privacy releases from constituents. Each agency has its own processes and requirements. Having some type of portal, either created by the executive branch or by the House where constituents could securely provide their information and provide digital signatures, has the possibility to free up staff to do the more substantive work of engagement with the executive branch agencies and bringing successful casework results to constituents.

The next area I would recommend examining is security for district offices. While security is not my expertise, I would recommend having the authorizing committee, the Committee on House Administration, work with the Sergeant at Arms to see if the process for security expenses can

be reformed. Currently, many expenses are paid for from the MRA where Members are weighing budgetary constraints and needs against the security of their staff.

Based on past incidents and events, the Committee on House Administration previously took steps to authorize central funding for certain district office expenses through consultation with experts such as the Sergeant at Arms. I would recommend a process whereby security needs are examined and recommended by the Sergeant at Arms and entirely paid through a centralized funding mechanism with the appropriate oversight and sign off by the Committee on House Administration. Security is always about balancing access of your constituents with making sure Members and staff are safe at all times. If a Member office wanted to go beyond what was recommended by the security experts, this process could still allow Member offices to pay for those expenses from the MRA with some process for final approval, either at SAA or CHA. This solution would minimize having the Member weigh security decisions against other factors within the overall MRA budget.

Another area related to security funding is how the House is billed for federal office space. When I worked here, GSA billed in a manner where security expenses were distributed amongst all of their tenants. This meant Members were sharing costs for enhanced security expenses required by other tenants of the building. The judicial branch, which may need enhanced security for their proceedings, is an example. As such, the cost of securing federal space by House Members could be cost prohibitive, due to those additional costs shared amongst all the federal building tenants. It may be worth examining whether Members could pay a more proportional cost in their rent based on their basic security needs versus potentially subsidizing enhanced security measures that do not apply to them.

As a related issue, this Committee may wish to focus particular attention to enhanced security protocol education and best practices for freshman offices. The Sergeant at Arms provides helpful guidance in the manuals they provide offices. However, in many instances, freshman offices have new district staff who may never have dealt with groups of protesters coming to their office or with angry or threatening constituents or extra security that may be necessary at official events. I would also recommend some additional educational handholding and enhanced protocols focused on new staff as a whole, but particularly in freshman offices. I remember once asking veteran offices if every person in their office was aware of where the emergency gathering points and protocols were for the office, and many times the newest staff and/or interns were overlooked and uninformed about important emergency procedures.

The last area I'll focus on deals with how transitions take place, with particular attention to incoming freshman district offices. Currently Members and the House are not allowed to expend any funds for incoming Members' new district offices until the Congress begins. In contrast, in Washington outgoing Members of Congress are required to vacate their offices in December so that they can be refurbished in time for the new Congress in January. The result is that Members get the keys to their D.C. offices, which are fully operational on swearing-in day, but district offices could take up to two months to be fully operational with full internet services and necessary security. This is especially important every ten years after redistricting,

when significant changes to district lines require Members to move district offices. After the last decennial redistricting in Pennsylvania, nearly every Member of the delegation maintained a district office outside of their new district lines. This situation is likely to repeat itself after the 2022 elections.

I would recommend the House be allowed to, at the direction of the incoming Members, pay for certain components or installations to accelerate the establishment of district offices. It may require the House to engage in short-term leases to access the properties prior to swearing-in day. And I'm sure this would be a challenge for institutional offices. However, this would create a degree of parity between district offices, and the D.C. offices so that Members are fully operational on January 3.

With that, I'll conclude my remarks, and again I thank the Select Committee for providing me with this opportunity to speak before you today.

The CHAIRMAN. Terrific. Thank you, Mr. Hadijski.

Before we begin a period of extended questioning, I want to invite Representative Perlmutter, if he has a few words. I know one of our witnesses is a special guest from your office. So let me recognize Mr. Perlmutter.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And Danielle Radovich has been my chief of staff for the whole time we have been here, and just very happy for her to be able to testify and kind of describe some of our experiences which, really, we have been—I think the district offices sometimes are thought of as the frontier and kind of forgotten in so many ways, particularly resources and some of the technological resources.

So, Danielle, if you would kind of comment a little more on some of the things where we have struggled, particularly with the internet, with WiFi. You mentioned it a little bit in your opening, but if you could touch on that a bit. And then maybe one of George's comments about, you know, particularly during the pandemic, we were just swamped, both technologically but also in terms of demands on staff. We saw our casework just go through the roof. So if you could comment on that.

Ms. RADOVICH PIPER. Mr. Chair? Okay. Yes. Thank you.

I think I can give one example that illustrates the real challenge, particularly the WiFi challenge and capability. So in March of 2020, when we all—when the pandemic hit and we all went to work from home, basically all at once, there was a run on laptops. There was a run on equipment for the House. It was hard to get laptops, iPads, what have you. We were able—we also took our internship fully remote, and that was the first time we had ever done that. We had never done a remote internship before. So we really didn't know what we were doing until we were doing it.

The only—and, of course, as you know, because of the House, the firewall, the intranet, the use of the VPN, you have to have approved equipment. And in doing so, you have to have it set up correctly. So for our interns who, in some cases, were not all based either in Colorado or in D.C., they were all over the country, we had to set up iPads for the interns, and then we had to mail iPads across the country so that they could actually access the House information to be able to do their internship. And because we didn't have WiFi, and as you all know from iPads, you can't hardwire an iPad into the internet in your district office. So we—our staff assistant had to sit out in the hallway of our office, borrow the WiFi from the office suite next door to us for hours on end, setting up the iPads to get them out to interns.

It was really challenging and very stressful, as you can imagine, because the whole work-from-home situation came at us really quickly, and things were a mess anyway. So that was a very challenging situation for us and would hope we could rectify that.

The other technological piece of all of this, really, it does go back to it is the accessing and transmitting everything with every click that you have to go through D.C., right. So—because you have to go to the main server, and it is the time it takes to have to transmit that information is really a lot of lost productivity.

The other piece that I mention more in my longer remarks for written submission are the phone systems. There is not one stand-

ardized way for district offices to do their phone system for the purchasing, for setting it up with the provider, and it is all very confusing. And you have to work with three different people or four different people within the CAO in order to get it done, and it seems like there could be some real streamlining of services there.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you. I will yield back to the chair. I am just glad that Danielle—I have been hearing about this as the Member about, wait, why don't—why do we get treated like second-class citizens out here in the hinterlands. But, you know, we have been able to work around and, obviously, they figure it out. But we could make it easier, especially, you know, somebody new coming in, as Sarah was talking about, as George was talking about, if there is more attention paid to the district office, because this is where the rubber meets the road is out here in the district offices. That is where you touch the constituents on a, you know, hourly basis. So, thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Perlmutter. And I will recognize myself and Vice Chair Timmons to begin a period of extended questioning of the witnesses. And just a reminder, any member who wishes to speak or ask a question can just raise their virtual hand or, you know, gesture like you are coming in for a landing or whatever you wish.

I want to start by just asking about some of the challenges with regard to starting up an office. I think each one of you spoke in your testimony and provided more detail in your written testimony about just some of the challenges of setting up a district office for the first time.

I would love to ask our witnesses, you know, one, what do you see as sort of the most difficult piece of that, and if you have a recommendation for the committee about how we could maybe improve that? I think we are keen to help there.

Mr. Hadijski, you mentioned something that I think is kind of an interesting idea, and that is, you know, having the House, in essence, have a startup fund. You know, I am curious if folks have reactions to that and if there are things that you think ought to be—kind of ought to be covered and ought to not be covered in that type of a setup.

But let me start with the general topic of, what is the toughest part of starting up an office, and what would you do to fix it?

Go ahead, Mr. Hadijski.

Mr. HADIJSKI. Yeah. I think you are hitting on a foundation question, right. The big problem right now is that not every location, not every district is wired well. And building on kind of the earlier discussion, that really is key for Members as far as like being able to talk about communicating with their constituents, having that first touch, when freshman offices in particular are affected, but it is going to really be an issue with regard to redistricting coming up when a lot of Members may have to move their district offices.

But going into new facilities, getting that infrastructure wired up, and getting a head start would be helpful, I think, to incoming freshmen members, in particular, but to anybody that is really moving any district offices. Because getting that, you know, broadband access, getting wired up in the office, Members anymore

these days, you know, that is how they communicate with their constituents. And you are talking about social media, whether they are, you know, communicating via electronic mail. It really is about a digital world and making sure that the Member is up and running.

In many cases, particularly if Members are going into an older building, if they are, you know, going into a new space, they aren't wired upfront. And usually that process doesn't start until the beginning of the Congress when there is a lag and then Members aren't able to get operational right up on day one. And so that is a big challenge, you know. Your members are going to be dealing with constituents from day one, so it makes sense to have that office fully operational on that day one.

The CHAIRMAN. So is that what you would cover—when you made the recommendation that there be some sort of a startup fund that the House covers, maybe not necessarily out of the MRA, is that the most significant investment that you are talking about, which is just getting wired, and so that on day one you have got phones and internet and you can get cooking?

Mr. HADIJSKI. Yeah. That is a key component, because if you are——

The CHAIRMAN. Is there something else?

Mr. HADIJSKI. If your systems aren't ready, you know—I think the committee looked at staffing during that interim time period from after the election, and all of a sudden, it made sense to centrally appoint staff that are going to be working on setting up the office. Well, the same thing can be true on setting up district offices as well, right. If you have a central funding mechanism and you can access that, maybe the incoming Member doesn't have access since the outgoing Member represents that district until January 3, then at least getting the setup so that the Members that are coming in or any new district offices can begin on day one. I think that would be helpful to Members in general.

The CHAIRMAN. Do either of our other witnesses want to take a swing at this?

Ms. YOUNGDAHL. I would be happy to. I think the biggest issue we found was casework. We were coming in, as I said, to brandnew districts, and we found that a lot of constituents reached out to us, one, when they finally were able to, once our phone systems and emails were all set up. They were saying, well, the outgoing Member said they weren't going to be my Member in 3 months, so they really didn't want to take up the case because they knew this was maybe a 6-month process.

So there were a lot of constituents who went—by the time they got to us, they had already been waiting for normal processing time of possibly 6 months, 3 more months waiting for the election and the new swearing in. So hearing that and the constituents just already feeling so disenfranchised at that point was really tough.

And having a lot of the setup where we would find out about it as we were going forward. So when I spoke on the internet for the satellite office, while that office is completely functional and where I sit today, the internet wasn't provided to us. We were told, you need to make the call to your internet provider. You need to set

up the installation and stuff. While the flagship, they are like, it is set up, here you go, here is everything you need.

And while I understand the finances were different and there is that separation, it just—it seemed like we as staff who didn't know what we were doing really, had to reinvent the wheel that was already made for us on the other side.

The CHAIRMAN. That is helpful.

Ms. Radovich Piper, do you want to take a swing or should I move on?

Ms. RADOVICH PIPER. I just—one thing, to not be repetitive. There is something, though, that I think is as important as tackling the technological piece. And when you first open an office, it is establishing what your Member priorities are. And this doesn't fit in the bucket of technology, but it does fit in the bucket of what kind of a congressional office do you want to be for your constituents, and that can sometimes dictate, then, how you set up your office and your offices.

So if the emphasis really is on constituent and outreach and you are going to be the most accessible, you know, Member that you can be, those decisions, I believe, are more helpful made from the outset, because it can decide, well, how many offices are you going to have then? Well, and then what kind of technology do you need and how many staff members do you need? So I think something that is nontechnologically based but is equally as important is establishing those priorities early on.

And back to the alphabet soup of acronyms that we have on the Hill, it really is that customer advocate now that has been set up for us is so critical. And if I—if we during new Member orientation had had that customer advocate to go to, I wouldn't have necessarily had to go, well, GAO does this and HIR does this and GSA does this, and you have to—I didn't know what any of those things were, not to mention I was 8 months pregnant at the time, so that was also a bit of a situation for all of us. I am not sure I would recommend it. But we definitely could have used that one person to say, okay, how do I have to get the phones?

The CHAIRMAN. Great. Vice Chair Timmons, and then I have got you, Ms. Van Duyne.

Mr. TIMMONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Beth, would you like to go first since you are in the car? You can go ahead if you want.

Ms. VAN DUYNE. Thank you. Do you mind? I am sorry. Yeah. We are on the way to go to meet the [inaudible] as a freshman office, I can—first, I want to thank all of the witnesses, because we have experienced exactly the same thing.

Something, you know, you are saying that you should be able to have everything set up, you know, so that you are ready to go on January 3. Technically, we are not allowed to do that. Budgets don't start till January 3, so, technically, you don't even have anybody who can do that because you don't have an employer—or employee at that time. So I don't know if there is anything that we can do about that, but that makes it very difficult, because you really can't even hire anybody until January 3. We didn't even get access keys to our office until January 3. So there definitely is a

gap where your constituents aren't getting that kind of casework help that they need.

Another thing that we found had to do with casework files. The previous Member in our case did not share any of those casework files, and the people who end up suffering is not our office, it is the constituents. So I don't know [inaudible] do we have other solutions to that when the former elected official is completely, you know, silent on that issue? What choice—what work do we—could we do to possibly change that?

The CHAIRMAN. Go ahead. Would any of our—yeah. Go ahead, Mr. Hadijski.

Mr. HADIJSKI. Yeah. I think on the issue—I will take the first one. On the issue of accessing the office, most of the setup I am talking about is basically getting the infrastructure and the office up and running. And so it is more dealing with the vendors and having maybe the CAO or contractors engage with the House where they can set up the office. The incoming Member may not be able to access it until January 3, but if the CAO can occupy even a short-term lease and pay for those expenses from a central fund and get the office kind of wired and get it set up so that the computers, wiring, the WiFi, all that stuff is ready to go, that might be helpful, and paying for that centrally instead of paying for it by the incoming Member or the incoming Member's staff. And so it would be more of an institutional thing.

On the issue of casework, we had started to look—when I was at House Administration, we started to look at kind of the options for possibly standardizing transitioning casework. Right now, it is very deregulated, right. Each Member kind of decides whether they are going to give the casework back, have them start up with the incoming Member. Some Members, there is a friendly transition, and so it may be a little smoother.

But casework is the one thing that is maybe one of the most significant things a Member engages in with their constituents, right. And so it might be helpful to look at some kind of standard process that everybody adheres to, and you just know up front, these are going to be the processes for transitioning casework. Because it is the one thing that is really—you are not talking about a partisan issue. You are talking about something that is about helping constituents, right. You are trying to secure their checks, and you are trying to help them engage, cut through the red tape with executive agencies that they are having problems with. And so you are really more talking about a customer service issue, and things like that should not really be a partisan transition thing. They should be more of a standard practice.

And so that is why I would recommend maybe looking at some type of standard process for transitioning casework between Members, and then you don't have to deal with a friendly-unfriendly transition.

Ms. VAN DUYNE. Actually, that would be great, because, again, the people who suffer the most are your constituents, and it is completely nonpartisan. So anything that we can do on that side would be very helpful.

Does anybody else have any kind of solutions, ideas on that?

All right. Well, thank you.

Ms. YOUNGDAHL. Oh, I was just going to say that I think having the partnership with the agencies and speaking to them, I understand that they give our specific office authorization when the constituent signs off, but if the agency or there would be something where it would be to the House or where we wouldn't have to have the constituent re-fill out a privacy form and provide all that documentation they had given to the other offices would be helpful.

Ms. VAN DUYNE. Okay. And then also having access to programs that the former Member may not have had but that are official programs that normal congressional offices could run, that would be also good. Because we were—like, for example, like the art competition and things like that, I know the previous office holder had not really utilized some of those programs, and it took us a couple of months to be able to jump into it. So having like a list of all of those things that we could potentially do for our constituents as far as a service for our office would be really helpful.

I yield back. Thank you very much, Congressman Timmons, Ranking Member Timmons, for letting me have that moment. So we are here now, so we are going to sign off.

Mr. TIMMONS. Happy to do it. Good luck with the rest of your day.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, Ms. Van Duyne.

And I think that is actually an interesting idea, this notion of maybe having just sort of, you know, the stuff your district office can do handbook. I mean, I was in office for a few years before I realized the opportunity to do the pinning ceremony that Ms. Radovich Piper mentioned for Vietnam veterans, just as an example. And so that is—I think we are on to something there.

Vice Chair Timmons, let me yield to you.

Mr. TIMMONS. Sure. I will jump in.

So I wanted to—I really like the idea of facilitating better continuity between offices and allowing members that are going to be sworn in on January 3 to really get some sneak peek or start doing their—be ready to execute their job on January 3.

One thing that came to mind, when I was a freshman, we actually had Young Kim and Gil Cisneros both waiting on their election results. So, I mean, they both came to orientation. So while this would help the vast majority of the Members' offices, certain issues would be created, so I guess we can look into that.

I want to start out with questions for the district directors. I would like to ask your perspective, district perspective on an issue that I always talk about, scheduling and the calendar and, in particular, how to achieve reliability and certainty for you in how we serve our constituents back home. Can you talk a little bit about what scheduling is like for you with a Member in the district and whatever challenges you face, particularly during busy committee workweeks like this? I had to gavel into Financial Services and Modernization at the same time. That was not fun. I am sure Mr. Cleaver had the same issue. So could you just speak to any challenges with schedule and the calendar broadly?

Ms. YOUNGDAHL. Yeah. I would——

Ms. RADOVICH PIPER. Go ahead, Sarah.

Ms. YOUNGDAHL. I would be happy to. I think that the biggest challenge that we see is just sometimes the uncertainty with when

it comes to we are coming on, say, this committee week and we are trying to schedule a month in advance because we have a four-county district. So I know many other Members have much larger districts than ours, but even getting from one end of the district to the other takes maybe 2 hours. So we are trying to schedule as much as we can in certain areas, and we are trying to get everything scheduled. And then if something pops up where they have to be pulled into session again or pulled into a committee meeting, that totally upends it. And, unfortunately, sometimes it strains relationships with whomever we scheduled with because we are like, it is out of our hands. And they were all prepared and ready to have us, and sometimes we are able to fill in staff, which is great, but we promised the Member. So I think that is our biggest issue is just the uncertainty that comes with it.

Ms. RADOVICH PIPER. Yes. I agree with Sarah. I really understand—and I guess we will find out if my boss and I have different thoughts on this issue, but I certainly understand the reason behind the committee workweeks. I will tell you, from our perspective, the addition of committee workweeks has been the most challenging on this schedule, and the reason is because of the unpredictable nature of those committee workweeks.

There is always a bit of unpredictability in what we do, right, and scheduling and working around at any time things have to be pulled down or brought back up on the schedule or pulled off the schedule or changed on the schedule. However, the addition of the committee workweeks has brought an additional layer of unpredictability that has made it much harder.

Part of the reason is because we don't know what is happening on committee workweeks until the Friday or the Thursday before that week. So it makes it really hard to do any of the other things, meetings or outreach or other visits, during that week while, you know, our boss is in the district, whereas it is a little more predictable when you are in session and you have votes. There is a rhythm we all end up getting into, even though, you know, again, that rhythm changes. And then district work periods, there is more predictability there. But it is those committee workweeks that I feel like have been a real challenge for us from the scheduling perspective.

Mr. TIMMONS. Sure. Thank you. I have got two quick questions.

Mr. Hadijski, could you talk a little bit more about, I guess, the challenges that Member offices face with constituent services in terms of natural disasters? I have been fortunate, in my 3 years in Congress, to not have any natural disaster occur in my district, but I can imagine that when you have thousands or tens of thousands of constituents that need help from the Federal Government, it can be overwhelming. We had a Member retreat recently and this came up. I mean, is there any thought of having a float constituent services team that can go wherever it is needed? I mean, just talk a little bit about that broadly.

Mr. HADIJSKI. Yeah. Those are always really, you know, tricky situations because, in many cases, when your district has been hit by something that badly, all of a sudden, it is like even your infrastructure is not, you know—trying to communicate with constituents becomes the first order of business. And over the years, the

CAO has kind of done a really good job at trying to figure out how do we get, like, equipment, how do we get, you know, set up basically like a temporary shop in those areas that are hit by natural disasters. And so usually House Administration will engage and find out what is needed.

The issue is more on the rules side, right, because there are a lot of entities that are providing assistance, but they may not be governmental entities. And Members in the past have been limited as far as like what interactions, you know, they can have with private entities and how much assistance they can get because of the ethics rules. You can't have private subsidies of official activities. And so in those areas, that may be, you know, ripe for examining just kind of like, during those situations, if it is assistance, is there a way to see if there is a way to exempt the rules to allow, you know, for that interaction.

Currently—or when I left, the Members were allowed to engage and put information on their websites. They can send out information, but it was typically limited to what was provided on government websites. It was what was provided on the executive branch assistance websites or ones that contracted with the government, so there were some limits. But it may be worth examining, like, the ability to kind of interact so that Members—constituents are getting whatever assistance they need, you know, at a time of crisis.

And so that might be an area to explore as far as like looking at House Admin and the ethics rules and seeing if there is more that can be done, because there are still—even now, even relaxing them over time, there are still restrictions that Members have to be mindful of as far as what resources you are promoting, what interactions you are having when you are trying to provide that assistance.

Mr. TIMMONS. Sure. Thank you. I have one followup, but I am going to wait till everybody goes.

Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. I saw Mr. Perlmutter raised a hand. I don't know if it was in followup to something that Ms. Van Duyne asked. But I am happy to see if others want to pull on this thread around district office startup, and, if not, we can shift gears.

Go ahead, Mr. Perlmutter.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Yeah. Beth was asking about, you know, sort of the transition stuff and felt like apparently she had—I can't remember who preceded her, but was not much help in terms of the transition. I can say the guy who preceded us—and, Danielle, you can chime in—you know, they basically didn't assign somebody to us, but they were very helpful to us during our transition. And, in part, they had chosen to go—the guy who preceded me, Bob Beauprez, ran for governor, so he knew he was on the way out.

And, you know, as we are transitioning out, we found that there are steps that we can take. Do we continue to take new cases all the way to the end or do we at some point cut it off so that we can finish the work that we have had. And, you know, our goal is to be able to, you know, hand it off to a Democrat or Republican, hopefully a Democrat, but hand it off in as clean a fashion as possible, and we will see, you know, how that works. But we are doing this in advance.

If you have got that other situation, William, you mentioned where, you know, you have got—you got it through the election, almost, you know. The person loses. You know, how happy are they to be, you know, handing it off to the person who just beat them. That is a whole other dynamic than what we are facing. But there is a pretty good system, and Danielle's already been involved with it. If you are leaving in advance or you know you are leaving, there is a pretty good transition approach that is taken.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Williams.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Hello, everybody. Just to chime in, because I am still going through the freshman office woes, thinking through the transition of not only casework but also like database of, like, constituent communications, email lists. When I asked this question during freshman orientation, I was told that the previous Member could sign off to transfer things over to the new Member. Well, but I had a unique case because the previous Member, Mr. Lewis, passed away. And so they said, then, typically they revert to the wife to act—so that the wife could transfer information to the new Member, but Ms. Lillian passed away before Mr. Lewis did. So they said that I was in a unique situation, and so I started from scratch. Zero. Nothing. Because staff were not allowed to transfer information over, it had to come specifically from the Member is what I was told by House Administration during new Member orientation.

And so I think that this information shouldn't belong to a Member. It should belong to the district or to the—like, we are doing work for people here, not for our own benefit. And then to complicate things even worse, there was someone for 30 days in this seat who opened up a ton of cases and had people thinking that all of this work was going to happen when he was in Congress for 30 days, and nothing was closed. And so I had all of these things waiting where people were, like, we were told this was going to happen.

And so coming up with a way that this information does not belong to the specific Member but it belongs to the district and so that it goes from office to office regardless of the party that is in the office, regardless of who the person is so we are not waiting on a Member to grant someone permission to serve the constituents that we are supposed to be serving.

The CHAIRMAN. I think this is a really good topic. Do any of our witnesses want to chime in on that, the challenges with regard to casework when you are in startup mode, but even on an ongoing basis? I know some of you testified about some of the just challenges on the casework front. Anyone want to give us—give the committee some recommendations we ought to be thinking about in that space?

Go ahead, Mr. Hadijski. I saw you unmute.

Mr. HADIJSKI. Yeah. I can talk a little bit about this. A lot of times, it is—there are agreements, obviously, privacy release forms, things like that, Social Security numbers, and so there is a lot of data that is viewed as an agreement with that specific Member. So I am wondering, I don't know if it is possible, but maybe there is a way that some of the information can be segmented, and things that are official legal agreements with the previous Member, those, you know, can be separated out. And maybe the database, the valu-

able information to an incoming Member of names and addresses and topics and issues, maybe those kind of things can be separated out and transferred over to an incoming Member.

I am not the—technical expertise is not my strong suit, but there may be something where you can provide the incoming Member with the data that would be helpful that takes, in many cases, years to accumulate. And those kind of lists, distribution lists, and topic, you know, IDs with certain constituents, but maybe there is a possible way of doing that. It just probably has to be looked into.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Radovich Piper.

Ms. RADOVICH PIPER. Yes, exactly. Well, thank you. There might be actually a more simple fix to this, potentially, by adding some language to the privacy agreements that are already standardized, but maybe you add some kind of transfer language to the privacy agreement where the constituent has to initial. I assume the Office of General Counsel would need to take a look at all of that, but that might be the way of—a more simple way of fixing the problem is adding that language to the privacy release, because we all need privacy release forms anyway from the constituent to do the work with the agency. So if you add that transfer language and they have to initial, that might help to solve some of this.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you. At the end of the day, our constituents want—if they are reaching out to a congressional office, they are usually at their last straw because they have exhausted other resources. And so then to tell them that they have to start all the way over because I am a new Member, it just doesn't seem fair to the constituent.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. If I could just jump in. From a legal standpoint, and, William, David, you could jump in too. I mean, I would consider everything that I do is district business and it is not my business. And so I am a little bit surprised by House Administration's, you know, conclusions here. So I would like to take a look at that as well.

And even with the privacy release, it is still with the office. It is not with me, you know. It is not with you. It is with your office. So I think we ought to take a look at House Administration, and I wish Zoe were on here because that doesn't make sense to me, what they told you.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Williams, do you have anything else you want to ask about?

Ms. WILLIAMS. No. This was—right now, this is it.

The CHAIRMAN. I think you are on to something, and I think that is another great topic for us to explore with the potential of making some recommendations for reform in this space. Because, again, if the idea is to help our constituents, this should be more seamless for them. So great, great topic. Thank you for raising it.

Mr. Cleaver, I see your hand up.

Mr. CLEAVER. Yes. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman, this is actually one of the reasons that I have become obsessed with GSA playing the role of a landlord in terms of them getting our offices and getting them ready. I think when we start talking about the wife makes the decision, it harkens back to a day that I think—that I thought we had left behind. Dick Bolling was in Congress 34 years in the Fifth District, you know. He was, you know, one

of the old bulls of the House. His wife, who I love, she was very helpful to me in my campaign. She was his chief of staff, essentially. And I just think, you know, this preordained role for a spouse—for wives, not spouses, wives is just kind of—it gives a bad taste in my mouth.

But the other part, what I really want to talk about is this is one of the reasons I think GSA is important. I was elected in some weird situation that essentially didn't have an office anyplace, and I didn't even know what kind of office I needed. I mean, you know, I didn't know if I needed an office like I have in the church that I pastored. I didn't know if I—you know, I didn't know anything except that I had just won an election. And nobody called and said, this is what you need to do, do this and do that and do this. Nobody.

And the previous people had put offices near their homes, you know, the previous members from the Fifth District. And, anyway, I ended up going into the Federal building paying almost $100,000 a year in rent, and then leaving as soon as I—once I realized what was going on.

I think to do all of this stuff without—all of this, you are just getting—like, all the stuff falls in on us, and then we have to go out and become a realtor, you know, trying to find an office. And it is just—I think we are making it difficult. And I think let's make life difficult for GSA. I mean, everybody who works over there, they understood when they took that job what it was. You know, we didn't take a job, you know, about finding office space.

And so the GSA people, when you talk to Robin Carnahan, the GSA Administrator, she will tell you, yeah, we have headaches, and it was her—what she said to me. Well, when you apply for job at GSA, you are saying, I like to have a headache. And so let's give it to them. I think, you know, we can save ourselves a lot of distress.

And when we had this discussion with the Missouri delegation last week, Roy Blunt said it has been going—the GSA has been doing this for us so long that nobody even remembers when it didn't happen. And so I just think we are making life a little more difficult than it should be.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Any of our witnesses want to respond to that or react to that?

Go ahead, Ms. Youngdahl.

Ms. YOUNGDAHL. Yeah. I have a funny story about the GSA. When we started, being that we were in a brandnew district, we had the leftovers of the leftovers in terms of picking furniture. And myself and the district director at the time were in a warehouse opening up crates and trying to figure out what we needed for spaces that we weren't even sure we had at that moment. So we were like, is this printer even working? Does this laptop connect to internet?

So I must echo that. I think GSA could do a really better job in preparing, because we didn't know what we were doing and it was quite a headache to even find matching chairs for us. And, again, there was an office prior to us who got first dibs. And while we did get a stipend to fill in what we weren't given from the GSA, it was

still—even then we didn't know what we should buy. We didn't know what was the best thing for our buck.

Mr. TIMMONS. To that point, let me just add something real quick. I am getting hit in the campaign issue because I purch—I spent money to up the office that I am saving money because I consolidated, so there is a political issue that is associated with this as well. I mean, I had to buy furniture because they didn't have any left, so, I mean, whatever.

Mr. CLEAVER. And that is one of the points, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Vice Chair, is that, you know, if you come in and buy a new cute chair, then you are just—I mean, you are going to make plans to read about it, you know. It is $2.98, whatever it is, you know, he is already going out and spending a lot of money. He or she is already buying drapes and so forth. Let GSA do it. I mean, nobody gets mad at GSA, I mean, unless somebody's stealing ballpoint pens or something, you know. Let GSA handle that.

We have got—we are supposed to be running the Nation and, by extension, the world, and we are running around trying to find chairs. You know, I just—I don't get it. I don't understand it.

The CHAIRMAN. I am just jealous. I heard Ms. Youngdahl say that they have matching chairs in their office. I am still not there, so that is amazing.

Mr. Cleaver, do you have anything else you wanted to ask about or—okay.

Anyone else want to ask about the startup stuff? Otherwise, I might want to shift gears. I don't—Vice Chair Timmons, did you have something on this topic?

Mr. TIMMONS. Sort of. I mean, with respect to the technology issue, I know we have talked about WiFi. My follow-up question was, what other technology issues do you have? I lasted, I think, 3 months on the House servers. I now use Gmail. I just said—I just can't—I can't manage it. It was constantly creating problems. So, I mean, what other challenges relative to technology have you all experienced?

And I guess the other thing was, how prepared were you all for COVID when you had to send people home? Was that a huge challenge as it relates to getting technology that they could work from home with?

The CHAIRMAN. Go ahead, Ms. Radovich Piper.

Ms. RADOVICH PIPER. Yes. Thank you.

Well, I will answer the COVID question. The answer is yes. It was a huge challenge, a big surprise, and I wasn't quite sure that we were going to—I wasn't sure how we were going to make it work. We did.

Our issue was that not everyone between—we have two offices, one in D.C. and one in the district. We just have one district office. We have 15 total staff, including myself, and then our intern program.

As I mentioned earlier, not all of our full-time staff had laptops leading up to March of 2020. I just couldn't foresee that a global pandemic was going to hit and we were all going to have to work from home. I also couldn't foresee, before March 13 of 2020, how a district office would work remotely either, because we are so ingrained in the community and we depend so much on being open

and our office being open and having face-to-face contact with our constituents. So that was one of the biggest challenges was just wrapping my mind around how we were going to do this and still serve our constituents the way we have held ourselves to the standard.

And then not having enough laptops for everybody was a real challenge, which is—and then the House had a run on laptops, so they didn't have enough laptops, so that was why we purchased so many iPads. And so not only for the intern program did we have to purchase iPads, but we had to purchase iPads for our full-time staff. And then that created a problem because we use Fireside as our CMS provider, and our caseworkers who were on lap—on iPads, excuse me, were having a devil of a time connecting to Fireside. And so they were having a really hard time doing their casework, which resulted in us having to ask our D.C. staff, our leg team, to actually pull some casework duty because some of them had laptops that were easier to work on.

So, those first 3 months were a real rodeo, if you will. And then we, finally, in the summer when we were able to get laptops for each staffer, we then were able to sort of ease into the new normal at that time. So that was pretty tough.

I would say to your earlier question, the first question around navigating the technology, I think for my boss, really, he has not used the intranet all that much until—and has his own email. We just didn't use a lot of the official channels with him. So it was not as hard early on.

Thank you.

The Chairman. Anyone else want to respond on this? A rebuttal by Mr. Perlmutter?

Mr. PERLMUTTER. No. Just—my question is, is this being recorded?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. I want to shift gears—go ahead, Mr. Hadijski.

Mr. HADIJSKI. Just real quickly. We also found, you know, a lot of times people forget that a lot of times these individuals come in, and this is kind of in our—you know, in our basket here of management practices, right. A lot of the things—you are coming into a Capitol Hill office, and a lot of people have never had management experience before. This is where professional development and educational training, we think, you know, would be beneficial.

We initially, when the pandemic started and everybody had to kind of go to their—go remote, we had a training session for staff specifically in this area on just kind of developing plans, and this is a shameless plug for our publication. We have one that is specific to district offices called Keeping it Local, and it is a guide for managing congressional district and State offices. That hits on a lot of areas as far as like crisis management. It tells you kind of like how to develop plans.

A lot of, you know, staff aren't aware of these things, and these kind of training sessions sometimes can be really helpful to managers, particularly if they don't have any background in those areas. And so those are things that—like exactly what Danielle was talking about, we found a lot of people didn't have the right equipment, and we just need to develop kind of a strategic plan

and what exactly are your needs and how do you fulfill those needs, so——

The CHAIRMAN. I will give two quick public service announcements on that front. One, Mr. Hadijski, I want to just commend CMF. I got to listen to the first podcast directed at Members, and I thought it was terrific, looking at how we—how Members manage their offices. I think that type of—it is strange being in Congress in that there is not really professional development opportunities for Members, and I think we are working to change that, and I really commend CMF on that podcast.

Also, since we have, I think, covered well the topic of how we start up offices and technology. We are working with HIR to pilot WiFi in a few offices. You know, I think, again, sort of—private industry has sort of figured out how to use WiFi. We are working to make sure any sort of security issues would be addressed and the network could be protected from many bad actors trying to access it, so that has been the slowdown. But the—I think that is something that we have heard as we have engaged district directors and district staff along the way, so it is something we are working on.

I did want to just shift gears because I think at least one of you mentioned it in your testimony, the issue of how offices work with community partners, you know, when we do job fairs or when we do tax preparation services for constituents to talk about, you know, how do you get the Child Tax Credit or things like that.

I just want to get your sense of how that is going and what has been challenging on that front and if there are fixes you could suggest to just better facilitate those working relationships with outside organizations to serve your constituents while also complying with ethics rules. Any reactions to that topic?

Go ahead, Ms. Youngdahl.

Ms. YOUNGDAHL. Yeah. Coming into Congressman Reschenthaler's office from being the event coordinator in his State senate office, I did a ton of events from our State side, and doing senior fairs and that—those type of events for constituents. So I knew what was available through the State side, and I knew how meaningful it would be to partner with the State offices, and then now that we were on the Federal side, working with the Federal agencies, very similar how we did on the State.

But we have come into multiple cases where we speak with the agency or the State office, and they say, well, we can't have you saying that you are hosting it. We have to say we are hosting it. Well, we can only be—we can only have the Congressman as a speaker then.

So the verbiage just back and forth between ourselves and with whomever we want to partner with almost makes it not worth it, and then at the point of which we might strike out on our own and just do an event ourselves. Then somebody down the road is doing possibly the same event and constituents might be getting all the information they need, but they might have to go to four events to get what they are looking for.

So I think that is the biggest thing, that if we could have more understanding of what can be done overall. I know Pennsylvania is very unique in the sense of how involved the State legislature is in their agencies. And I know, speaking with some of our col-

leagues in other States, sometimes the State legislature is not as big and the congressional offices have to pick up what our State legislator does.

So understanding those lines as well as understanding how we can cross over would be a huge help whenever we are wanting to plan, and then making it easier for whenever, going back to new offices, understand what they can do and can't do when they want to do this outreach.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Hadijski, I think you referenced this in your testimony too. Do you have any reactions to this and areas where you think we could make some reforms?

Mr. HADIJSKI. Yeah. I think, you know, just examining how those rules with private entities, you know, and those interactions should be examined. Most of this stuff, you know—I am not the ethics expert, but the Ethics staff has really good staff there in their Advice and Education and kind of sitting down and maybe talking with them about examining some of these rules. You know, some of these rules date back to even the Watergate era. And so you wonder over time, you know, have they evolved to kind of capture or ensnare more things that were maybe not intended as a rule restriction.

And these kind of things, particularly with attention to serving constituents, where the Member is more just a facilitator of getting constituents, you know, assistance or information or resources, those are kind of areas that, you know, the private sector may fulfill a need that maybe the government entity may not. And so it may be worthwhile examining, you know, those specific rules, and can you put in something with some carveout or some checks in place that prevent exactly what the intent—the rule was prevented—you know, intended to prevent, like subsidizing official activity with private resources versus resources and information that can go directly to constituents, and the Member just more acts as a facilitator in that regard. So I think there is definitely room for reform and probably examining some of these rules.

The CHAIRMAN. Terrific.

Let me open up to the committee. Are there other topics that you all want to explore? I think we have unearthed some, I think, really good ideas in this space. But let me see if others have questions that we haven't hit.

Go ahead, Mr. Perlmutter.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. And Mr. Hadijski hit on one, and you were talking about it too, Derek. I think we end up tripping over ourselves. We really ought to go back and kind of do a look at some of the ethics rules that, you know, one guy 42 years ago did something that went a little too far, and then we put a rule in place that then creates a monster, where you really could help constituents.

We had—we ran afoul of this one a little bit many years ago where a woman who was in charge of our military and veterans stuff very much wanted to improve the lives of women in the military, and she got involved with some organization and was said to have been promoting it, which was in violation of whatever, you know, ethics rules and, you know, had to do a mea culpa and all that stuff. And all she was doing was helping women in the mili-

tary, you know. And so we need to take a look at some of those things.

We have had this big fire up north that wiped out a thousand houses. And so then the question becomes, can we only work with FEMA, or can we work with the Red Cross, and how does that—you know, how does that all play out, you know. And the private sector and the non-profits, you know, really play a big role in this, but there is this limitation that we have in assisting them or them assisting us.

So, I think, Derek, you are right, we ought to take a look at some of those ethics rules, because we just pile them on and we never go back and, you know, say, okay, this one was—just doesn't make sense anymore.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Radovich Piper, go ahead.

Ms. RADOVICH PIPER. There is another example that I could add to that that would underscore the need to possibly review some of those rules, and that was several years back in one of the government shutdowns. Our office, you know, as we know, that during that time of the government shutdown, it was Federal employees obviously were the most impacted immediately, and we had Federal employees. We don't—our district office is not housed in a Federal building; however, we do have an IRS office in our building and some other Federal agencies. And we had Federal employees come to our office who were just distraught over the shutdown and not getting paid and not sure what they were going to do and how they were going to do it and how they were going to pay their rent. And it was coming up on the first of the month at the time. I think this was in 2013, if I am not mistaken.

And one of the things that we wanted to do was provide—well, we were providing computer space for folks so they could come in. We could help them with unemployment. We were providing just a safe space for them to be and actually talk about their situation and how scary it was, helping them with housing situations, but we wanted to provide them some food and be able to take home, for instance, a sack lunch or something, right, and the House said no, that we can't—we couldn't do that, and we couldn't pay for that kind of thing out of the MRA. And, you know, these were for Federal employees. We weren't, you know, feeding the whole town. So it is just another example of something that could be looked at that seems maybe a little out of date or archaic.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. I am just looking to see if any other members have questions. I do—Ms. Youngdahl, I am curious. You know, a lot of our recommendations have come from Members who served in a State legislative body and said, hey, why is Congress like this? That is stupid. Are there other things that you witnessed when you served within the Pennsylvania State legislature that you thought, gosh, as we look at how district offices function or, you know, some of the rules or the resources, things that you think we ought to be looking at within this committee?

Ms. YOUNGDAHL. Yeah. I think going back to the idea of sharing casework and stuff, now with the House, we all have our different CMSs, but in the State legislature, we were all using the same one under the different caucuses. So Congressman Reschenthaler was

able to access data dating back to two, three senators of his district prior. And it was just in our CMS. It wasn't separated, and we could see if we had a frequent flyer or something like that.

We have brought over a lot of kind of the tactics that we used in terms of tackling casework, and it really helped us to understand what our needs would be also with the district in terms of the offices and the location. And I think having for each State, understanding what, like I said, the State can do.

So I know I worked with—I believe it was a Virginia office or a Maryland office, because they don't have a department of transportation on the State side with the legislators, and that is handled by the Congress, congressional office, so we were having kind of across State lines issue. While, for us, the department of transportation, any of those type of issues are handled through the State legislature.

So that understanding—I couldn't imagine coming into our office and not knowing where our congressional office fit, not knowing that, oh, this PennDOT issue, this department of transportation issue, that is a State issue, and just being—trying to figure that out and possibly even going to the point of which I would reach out to the Federal Department of Transportation, and they would be like, no, no, no. It is this level. So I think those clear guidelines of where things are handled through the States would be invaluable information, and it is just so different across the country.

The CHAIRMAN. Super.

Before we wrap up, any topics that our witnesses wanted to share that we didn't touch on? Otherwise, we will let you get on with your day. Any closing thoughts, or did we hit it?

I think I see mostly nodding heads. Terrific.

I thought this was great. And I just want to commend all of our witnesses. And I texted Mr. Perlmutter, Ms. Radovich Piper, he is lucky to have you. And, Ms. Youngdahl, Guy is lucky to have you too. So I am glad you are part of these terrific teams and have dedicated some of your professional time to serving the good people of Colorado and Pennsylvania, respectively.

I think we pulled some interesting ideas out of this, the idea of having some sort of a, you know, ready for day one fund that might be able to help you move into an office on day one that may have—in that it would be an office where the tech is ready to go. I think that is something that we should look at.

These issues around casework transition, I think, are also really valuable because, again, if this—if the goal of our committee is, you know, make reforms so that Congress works better for the American people, that casework, to Ms. Williams' point, should rest with the office, not with the specific Member, because having that kind of turn and making our constituents start over from square one doesn't seem right or fair.

Some of these issues around partnering with regard to, you know, resource fairs or with community organizations I think is a thread we can continue to pull on.

And then, Mr. Hadijski, I know you mentioned the issues related to staffing, particularly when there are issues—when there is an emergency or a natural disaster or something like that. I think those are good ideas that we can hopefully find some common

ground on as a committee. So thank you all for your recommendations.

With that, I also want to thank our committee staff for pulling together such terrific witnesses and for helping us put together another successful virtual hearing.

Without objection, all members will have 5 legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response, and I ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as you are able. Without objection, all members will have 5 legislative days within which to submit extraneous materials to the chair for inclusion in the record.

And, with that, this hearing is adjourned. Thanks, everybody. Appreciate you.

Mr. TIMMONS. Thank you all.

[Whereupon, at 1:27 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX I

February 15th, 2022

Anne Meeker
Director of Strategic Initiatives
POPVOX Foundation
Cleveland, OH

Dear Chair Kilmer, Vice-Chair Timmons, Members of the Select Committee, and staff,

Thank you for holding this hearing on Modernizing District Operations and for your continued leadership to make Congress stronger and more resilient. I have often said that the two things that give me hope for Congress are 1) serving as a caseworker, and 2) the work of the "ModCom" — so I am thrilled to see these two themes addressed in this hearing.

I had the privilege of serving as Director of Constituent Services in the district office of Congressman Seth Moulton [D, MA] until December 2019. Like so many, I started out with very little idea of how Congressional offices work — especially in districts. In time, I fell in love with the way casework combines the heart and the head of governing, the policy and the people.

I was fortunate to serve on a team that promoted a sense of mission and shared consciousness between the district and DC offices, and in an office that encouraged innovation and entrepreneurship. I am proud to continue that work at the intersection of technology, constituent engagement, and Congressional capacity in my current role as Director of Strategic Initiatives with the POPVOX Foundation. With that combined experience, I offer the following perspective in hopes that it can be helpful as the Committee considers recommendations for modernizing District Office operations:

Recommendation: The House should develop a unified method of tracking casework, creating a valuable early warning system for problems in the civic user experience.

If measured and monitored, Congressional casework can be the "canary in the coal mine" for programmatic challenges and inefficiencies. One of the modernization projects that provided the clearest payoff for the Moulton office was development of a casework "dashboard" to track basic analytics, such as caseload per caseworker, proportion of overdue cases, trends in our intake vs. closed rate over time, or responses to our casework survey. Over time we developed a system of "tags" that classified cases by agency, specific programs, problems or exacerbating factors: for example, where our CRM only came preloaded with a "Social Security" tag, our system could break down a case into "Social Security: SSDI => Disability Work Reporting + Mid-Atlantic Processing Center + Overpayment + Dire Need: Eviction." The dashboard also included constituent demographic information captured from the Privacy Act Release Form.

The technology itself was not sophisticated — just a Google spreadsheet — but it provided a real-time overview of our caseload that allowed for the prioritization of resources. If we saw a 200% rise in Board of Veterans Appeal cases over two years, we could raise the problem with local agency liaisons, refer to the legislative team for action, or develop educational resources to help constituents tackle or avoid a common problem.

While our office-specific response to the data produced significant efficiencies within the Moulton office, the potential impact of a House-wide casework analytics system is exponentially greater. A unified system of casework tags for House offices, and requiring CRMs to provide a way for offices to opt in to sharing anonymized casework statistics, could open up an unprecedented body of data on programmatic inefficiencies and "pain points" in the civic experience. This is data on gaps in federal customer service and policy implementation that doesn't always show up on federal customer service surveys, capturing the edge cases, the intractable cases, the hard-to-reach constituents who are least likely to answer surveys. This data would allow offices and committees to check statistics against nationwide trends and make an evidence-based determination on when a recurring problem is worth investing time into oversight activities and legislative action.

Recommendation: Congress should partner with federal agencies to help in getting vital information about agency programs to communities, especially 1) in crisis and 2) to communities that are traditionally difficult for agencies to reach. Part of this effort should include an up-to-date caseworker and outreach liaison directory accessible to federal agency liaisons.

Even though Congress is the First Branch of government, it's rare that Congress is held up as an example for the vastly better-resourced agencies of the Executive Branch to emulate: however, we noted just that in our submission for OMB's RFI on Methods and Leading Practices for Advancing Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through Government, highlighting what OMB can learn from Congressional caseworkers. While many federal agencies have been forced to move customer service operations online and to automated systems, Congress has maintained or expanded its number of district offices around the country, serving in some ways as a front office for the entire federal government.

As the last few years have shown, in a moment of crisis, having a single authoritative voice to synthesize information coming from multiple federal and state agencies and take that information out into the community to meet constituents where they are is crucial. Members have largely stepped up to the challenge, finding innovative ways to reach constituents, including through extensive networks of other local officials, service providers, and more.

This outreach and information-sharing partnership between Congressional offices and federal agencies already happens to some extent, but it could be further formalized and strengthened:

federal agencies often miss the opportunity to connect with district staff who are 'on the ground' in their communities, in part because frequent caseworker turnover means that agencies have difficulty keeping track of Congressional staff. Further, DC-based briefings may not translate to local outreach activities.

Above, we covered how Congress can take advantage of the data it already collects on constituent interactions with federal agencies; the mirror image is how federal agencies can strengthen partnerships with Congress to help advance shared goals of equitable outreach and better constituent service.

Recommendation: The House should provide ways for district staff to connect and share best practices, case studies, and tools

Individual offices are hotbeds for innovation, but these innovations are rarely shared. In 2018, after handling a series of difficult cases regarding Social Security's Windfall Elimination Provision, the Moulton team reached out to a local civic tech organization (Code for Boston, the local brigade of Code for America) to ask for technical assistance automating a complex spreadsheet that helped constituents calculate their benefits. After almost a year of weekly hack nights, user testing at town halls, the Code for Boston team rolled out an online calculator for WEP-affected benefits that was more user-friendly and accurate than materials available from Social Security.

We were thrilled with the app and excited to share with other congressional offices but found few good options for sharing the information. Ultimately, our outreach consisted of:

- Posting on the Caseworkers Assistance Listserv (notorious in its own right for being hit-and-miss on the quality of information shared)
- Briefing the Modernization Staff Association (Code for Boston's Thad Kerosky, and I traveled to DC to share the information in a discussion organized by the MSA)

This ad hoc information-sharing is typical of the grapevine networks of Capitol Hill that depend on relationships and serendipitous conversations but few formal channels. This informal system means that offices often perform duplicative work to develop resources and processes to serve constituents, as POPVOX Foundation has recently noted in its work on the reinstatement of Congressionally-Directed Spending and Community Project Funding.

Lorelei Kelly of the Beeck Center at Georgetown University recently called for an enterprise-wide digital commons for public-serving technology for Congress. This — as well as a method for archiving case studies for innovative processes that do not rely on technology — is absolutely part of the solution, and I hope the Select Committee will explore ways this might be possible.

Another part of the solution is to ensure that district staff have the same opportunities to connect and collaborate as DC staff, sharing the '201' and '301'-level expertise and innovations that will

move Congress as a whole forward. Bringing district staff together in person would also allow for the development of collaborative working relationships and would help level the playing field for particularly remote offices or offices with weak delegation ties.

Finally, as the Committee has aptly noted, recruiting, empowering, and retaining a diverse staff is vital to Congress's future: allowing district staff opportunities to learn from each other, develop professional mentorships, highlight their achievements to a professional audience, and feel like a part of Congress may go a long way toward building a generation of district office leaders committed to the long-term future of the institution.

Conclusion: Modernizing district office operations will have an outsized impact on Congress's resilience, capacity, and public trust.

District office modernization presents an opportunity to improve the accuracy and speed of information provided to constituents about their rights and responsibilities with the Federal government. When problems do arise, a House-wide casework analytics and tagging system can provide the basis for active oversight or legislative action to improve the civic experience. Furthermore, the insights and perspectives of district staff are a largely untapped resource for institutional improvements and providing greater opportunities for connection, collaboration, and information-sharing could bring significant benefit for each of the 441 offices in the House.

We are thrilled to see the Select Committee examine these opportunities in depth at today's hearing, and look forward to supporting recommendations in this area.

Very respectfully,

Anne Meeker

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