

Madam Chair, for 23 years, Congress had the benefit of a really excellent organization, the Office of Technology Assessment. The OTA helped Congress look at the policy implications of new technologies. Then 16 years ago, OTA was defunded. When Congress turned out the lights, they argued that other organizations would provide what OTA did--think tanks, academies, universities.

We now have 16 years of evidence that we have not gotten from these other sources what we got from OTA. We need OTA now more than ever, and my amendment would shift a mere \$2.5 million into OTA to breathe life back into this important agency that had a great record of improving congressional decisionmaking, preventing tax dollar waste, and generally improving the debate on many policy issues.

OTA is still on the books; it was simply defunded and, with this amendment, can be funded again. The money comes from a well-funded, little used trust fund for Capitol building revitalization.

The OTA produced thorough, balanced nonpartisan studies on a huge variety of policy-relevant subjects. Listen to some of the reports, all produced by OTA in the years before it was defunded 16 years ago:

Adverse Reaction to Vaccines, Retiring Old Cars to Save Gasoline and Reduce Emissions, Environmental Impact of Bioenergy Crop Production, Testing in Schools, Treatment of Alzheimer's Disease.

Think about it; these studies, a few of the many on issues of great concern to us today, were written before 1995. The OTA was the best tool Congress has had to deal with our inability to look forward, to recognize and comprehend trends, to find perspective in problem solving--in other words, our congressional attention deficit disorder.

Sixteen years ago, Congress hoped to save money by cutting OTA, and, in the process, we lost one of our best opportunities to save money by avoiding costly mistakes. It is documented that OTA saved taxpayers several hundred million dollars by understanding the best IT system for

use by the Social Security Administration, millions of dollars of savings through better Agent Orange programs, billions of dollars by avoiding a poorly constructed Synfuels Corporation.

Now, not every OTA project found favor with everyone. Some in Congress did not like to hear OTA call into question some of the extravagant claims of the missile defense contractors. But history shows OTA was right, and the missile defense folks at the Pentagon have spent a decade working around the problems uncovered.

Some in Congress complained that OTA reports did not have the quick turnaround of, say, CRS, but that is just the point. OTA is the antidote to the myopia that comes from our very short attention cycle.

OTA never advocated policy solutions; it didn't play politics. These are our jobs, but we need help. OTA was of Congress and for Congress. They knew our language and our decisionmaking framework. That's why our organizations never really filled the void created by the defunding of OTA.

If we had a functioning OTA in recent years, I think there's little doubt that we could have been more aware of and better prepared to deal with looming shortages of vaccines, to incorporate new designs for flood control levees, to extend high quality medical care to rural regions, to employ effective techniques for oil spill cleanup, or to reduce the risks of cell phone hacking, to name just a few issues of current interest.

The Office of Technology Assistance is not, and never was, a panacea. However, it is the best institutional tool we have had to recognize the policy implications of technology trends, to digest arguments involving technology, to expose some of our own blind spots--in other words, to illuminate and inform our legislating.

We in Congress have not distinguished ourselves in recognizing and comprehending trends and implications of technology. Now, most of our colleagues here in this body do not know OTA ever existed. Most Members do not miss it. This shows, I think, just how badly we need it. Always the first step in dealing with a shortcoming is acknowledging that we have it. We badly need OTA.

I reserve the balance of my time.