Sources Sought:
Committee Voting Solutions

The Office of the Clerk of the United States House of Representatives seeks information on technical solutions to improve and automate House Committee votes. The Clerk is looking for a range of information on current and future available solutions, including, but not limited to, commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) products and solutions used by other legislative organizations. These solutions should enable improved automation and data management of committee votes, including the dissemination to Members, staff, and the public, as well as the integration and data exchange with other Legislative Branch organizations and systems.

Background

The House has three types of committees: standing, select, and joint (see "Additional Resources" below for more information on committees). Currently, in the 117th Congress, the U.S. House has a total of 29 committees, of which 20 are standing committees, five (5) are select committees and four (4) are joint committees. There are 105 subcommittees, including the "Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis".

Each House Committee has a critical role in crafting public policy and conducting oversight functions. Some committees are responsible for internal administrative tasks. Regardless of a committee's jurisdiction or role in the U.S. House, their activities must be recorded, managed, distributed, and archived so that Members, staff, and the public can participate in their work and the work of the House as a whole. Committee rules, House rules, House and Committee practices determine the content, process, and procedures for recording, managing, and distributing information about committee activities, including Committee votes.

The size of each committee is determined at the beginning of each Congress by House leaders who set the number of committees and subcommittees, their size, and the ratio of majority to minority Members on each panel. House Members are typically limited to service on two committees and four subcommittees, with exceptions for certain committees. House Rules allow for all 435 Representatives, the four (4) delegates from American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Northern Mariana Islands, as well as the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico to be appointed to serve on House Committees.

Each House Committee is governed by rules adopted by the House and rules adopted by each committee when the committee is organized at the start of each Congress. Some of these rules impact current voting practices, and changes to these rules may impact future voting procedures and practices. It is important to note that any technical solution must be able to conform to both House and Committee rules, practices, and traditions. Moreover, because House and Committee rules can change, any solution must be adaptable in the face of the changes, which can occur at any time.

The Clerk is responsible for collecting and disseminating information on several committee activities, including (but not limited to) committee membership, meetings announcements (hearings, markups, and general or business meetings) and related meeting material (e.g., legislative text that may be

considered by the committee, witness statements, and Committee votes). Additionally, the Clerk is responsible for processing bills reported to the House and their accompanying reports. This information is often captured in document format and is distributed through multiple channels including portions of the printed and online *Congressional Record* and on the websites govinfo.gov, congress.gov and docs.house.gov via the Committee Repository.

As part of a comprehensive set of recommendations, the Committee on the Modernization of Congress recommends that there be "one-click access to see how Members of Congress vote in Committees" (116th recommendation 5, see "Additional Resources" below). The Clerk is seeking information on possible technical solutions in support of this recommendation. The Committee's Final Report (see "Additional Resources" below) describes the recommendation as --

> *The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 ushered in electronic voting on the House floor, making the process more efficient and transparent. Today, it's easy to find out how specific Members voted on roll call legislation. But this accessibility is limited to legislation in the chamber—not Committee votes or activity. Understanding how legislation and issues are voted on in Committees is sometimes more important than the final floor vote. Committees and subcommittees are where legislation is developed, issues are debated in-depth, and witnesses provide expertise. By the time legislation arrives to the House floor, it often has been refined and amended several times through.*

> *Despite the importance of committee and subcommittee activity, it is difficult to see how Members vote on legislation and issues in Committee. While the information is public, it's not easily accessible for most Americans, or even Members and their staff. Because each Committee sets its own procedures for recording votes and choosing when and how to make this information publicly available, there is no centralized source for Committee votes. With 20 permanent committees and well over 100 subcommittees (plus four select committees, including this Committee), following how Members vote and respond to issues is difficult and time-consuming to collect. While some subscriber services collect and provide this information to paying subscribers, for the average person this information is inaccessible.*

> *This lack of transparency advantages those who have time and resources to attend and monitor congressional hearings—often lobbyists and interest groups. While these groups often communicate votes to citizens or other Members, they are selective in their attention. As Mr. Schuman noted in testimony to the Committee, "some of the issue here is not about transparency yea or nay. It is about managing the consequences that some people have access to things in advance and some people don't."*

> *This lack of accessibility not only impacts citizens, but Members of Congress and their staff as well. To make committee and subcommittee activity more transparent and accessible for citizens, Members of Congress, and their staff, the Committee suggests publishing Committee votes online in a centralized location. The Committee envisions a centralized, electronic hub of Committee votes, accessible via House.gov and in machine-readable format. Each standing and select Committee should provide the House Clerk with detailed information on recorded votes within 72 hours.*

The current state of Committee votes

Committees take two types of votes – voice and recorded. A recorded vote records each assembled Committee Member's vote individually. A voice vote occurs when the Chair of the Committee states the questions, then asks those in favor to say "yea" and those against to say "no". The Chair announces the results according to his or her own best judgment. In a voice vote, the names of the Committee Members and the tally of the votes are not recorded.

Based on the Committee's recommendation, the Clerk wants to leverage modern technologies to improve this long-standing process, which is largely paper based today. Because of individual Committee rules and practice, this process can be complex, and the requirement to have paper archives remains both for the House and its Committees.   Currently, committees use a small set of tools and technologies for calling, recording, and publishing information about committee votes. For recorded votes, all committees produce a tally sheet that reflects each Member's individual votes, as well as a committee vote total and outcome. All committees, except for one, vote by responding to a verbal roll call by the Committee clerk, who then records the individual votes on paper. One committee uses an electronic system to gather vote responses while the Committee Clerk formally records the vote.

Recorded votes and the results of a voice vote are published in committee records (a Committee report, a hearing record, the Committee calendar, et.al.), the committee's website, and the Committee Repository. These records are also disseminated to the public online at govinfo.gov and congress.gov. Recorded vote information is not available as machine-readable data. It is simply a manually created PDF or scanned image of the individual votes from the tally sheet and published on docs.house.gov and in a printed committee document (often a report). Committee vote totals related to a particular bill are available as machine-readable data in the bill status bulk data on govinfo.gov.

In 2021, 1,131 committee meetings and 1,030 committee votes have been posted to the Committee Repository (https://docs.house.gov/Committee). This is higher than 2020, where 739 meetings and 232 votes were published.

Of the 1,131 meetings posted on the Committee Repository in 2021, 903 were categorized as hearings, 95 as general meetings, and 132 were categorized as mark-ups. Of the 1,030 documents categorized as Committee votes, 1,000 are associated with Committee mark-up meetings.

Objectives for improving Committee votes

To meet the intent of the Committee's recommendation, and to improve technology adoption across the House, the Clerk is seeking information on technical solutions for improving the committee voting process. The Clerk is seeking technical solutions to manage and disseminate Committee vote data. This includes seeking information on the re-use of this data by systems such the Committee Repository (docs.house.gov), Congress.gov, and the Committee websites. The Clerk wants to ensure that technical solutions for managing committee votes are available to all Committees and are easily adaptable to the rules, traditions, and practices of each committee. This includes voice votes and recorded votes.

The Clerk is seeking a broad range of information on applying technology to this problem. The Clerk and her staff know that improving the recording and dissemination of vote data could include solutions that range from a simple manual electronic entry of votes that a Committee staff person may enter while the manual pen-and-ink tally is being called by the Committee clerk to solutions that allow Members to

record their votes electronically based on a recorded vote managed by the Committee chair with assistance from the Committee clerk. The ability of the House and Clerk to adopt a specific solution relies more on the ability to meet the rules and practices of the committees and integrate the solution into existing systems than the sophistication of a particular solution.

To meet the intent of the recommendation, the Clerk has laid out the following objectives—

- Provide a consistent, easy-to-use set of tools for each committee that also allows for flexibility to accommodate variations in each committee's rules, practices, and traditions
- Produce recorded vote data and voice vote information in machine-readable and printed formats
- Provide for straightforward integrations with existing systems for collecting and disseminating committee information through existing publishing channels.
- Maintain vote integrity through established processes and supporting technology, and adhere to security best practices and House-wise information assurance (IA) policies

Scope of information

This request for information (RFI) seeks information and input from industry, academia, other legislative bodies, civil society organizations, and advocates on how to meet the objectives outlined above. This may include descriptions or case studies of voting systems used in other legislative bodies, existing COTS solutions that either support similar voting processes or can be adapted for that purpose, general systems designs or architectural patterns applicable to the problem, or existing solutions that could be generalized or adapted across all Committees.

All responses to this RFI need to clearly indicate their relationship to the committee voting process and the stated goals. Any proposed solution or architecture needs to specifically address House Committee voting process and the goals described above. The Clerk is attempting to understand the range of existing solutions, COTS products and related technical solutions that could be applied to existing practice and systems. The Clerk is not attempting to study voting systems in the abstract or to evaluate House or Committee practice, rules, or procedures.

Systems integration is critical for all House solutions, and especially for all systems managed by the Clerk. The Clerk is responsible for accurate and timely reporting of House activities to our data partners and to the public. Adding additional systems to the Clerk's technology portfolio without the ability to easily integrate the new application into existing systems increases the workload of existing staff and increases the likelihood of error and delays. Additionally, any system that cannot be easily adapted to Committee Member and staff workflows and Committee rules changes likewise increases the likelihood of errors and omissions.

Submission requirements

Responders may submit a report of no more than five (5) pages containing a description of an existing or potential system or discussion of an aspect of Committee voting discussed above. Responders may additionally submit a single page overview or outline of the content of their report. The summary may include text, diagrams, and other images as appropriate to convey the main ideas contained in your submitted material. Responders may also include a cover letter in their submission.

Additional resources

To learn more about committees in the House you can refer to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) report "Committee Types and Roles" at https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RS/98-241.

You can read more about The Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress and their recommendations at https://modernizecongress.house.gov/. The "RECOMMENDATIONS" section lists the Committee's recommendations for both the 116th and 117th Congresses. The Committee's Final Report for the 116th Congress (H.Rept.116-562) can be found on congress.gov and cited as follows:

"H. Rept. 116-562 - THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS, H.Rept.116-562, 116th Cong. (2021), https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/116th-congress/house-report/562/1."

Current committee activities can be tracked on the Committee Repository at docs.house.gov. This resource is managed by the Clerk to publish information about meetings, witnesses and associated committee work for the public.

Current committee membership is available on the Clerk's website (clerk.house.gov). The Official Alphabetical List of Members includes committee member information: https://clerk.house.gov/committee_info/oal.pdf