November 19, 2026

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable John Thune
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate

Restart the Office of Technology Assessment

Dear Speaker Johnson, Minority Leader Jeffries, Majority Leader Thune, and Minority Leader Schumer,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and individuals, we urge you to provide funding to restore and improve the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) in the 120th Congress, an opportunity that will present as early as the upcoming Continuing Resolution expiring in December. Although our organizations hold different views on how to govern emerging technology, we agree on the view that Congress should have its own independent experts to check the facts.

Artificial intelligence makes this urgent. Congress is being asked whether to preempt state AI laws, how to set export controls on chips and models, how to power the data centers AI demands, and how to protect children and workers. Each question turns on contested technical facts: what systems can actually do, whether safety evaluations are reliable, and whether a control can be evaded.

AI is also accelerating progress in fields where Congress faces equally technical choices: drug discovery and health care, synthetic biology and the biosecurity risks that come with it, advanced nuclear and the electric grid, cybersecurity, and the commercial space economy. The pace of change across all of them is outrunning Congress's ability to understand it.

On each of these issues, Congress depends on the parties it is supposed to check. Industry fields thousands of researchers and large lobbying operations. Executive agencies draw on the national laboratories and the intelligence community. Congress relies on what they choose to tell it. That weakens both policy and the separation of powers.

Congress needs a dedicated, member-facing office that can answer technical questions from members and committees in weeks and see what is coming before it arrives. Congress has spent two decades on substitutes, and they have not met the need. While we recognize the useful work undertaken by the Government Accountability Office and the Congressional Research Service, their culture, focus, and mission will prevent them from providing Congress

the science and technology assessment capabilities that formerly were met in the Office of Technology Assessment.

OTA served as Congress's science and technology advisor from 1974 to 1995, arising out of reactions to Sputnik and the threat of technological surprise by America's adversaries.[1] While it was defunded in 1995, it was never deauthorized. It could be restarted by turning on funding in the appropriations process. The bipartisan bill introduced on October 29 by Reps. Takano, Casten, Foster, Beyer, and Obernolte offers important reforms to the OTA model, but Congress should treat reauthorization and reappropriation as concurrent, parallel workstreams. The cost is modest. Congress appropriated $48 million in today's dollars for OTA in its final full year.[2] Its work produced multiples of its cost in savings through its work in early IT modernizations, spectrum auctions, and smart science and technology policy. Our request to provide $20 million to restart OTA would provision the office to hire its initial staff, set up a physical office, and restart this crucial work. In doing so, the office can be charged with recommending to Congress how its authorities should be updated to account for the 30 year interregnum.

OTA should be part of a broader reinvestment in Congress: committees, personal offices, and support agencies all need the resources to recruit and retain talent. Therefore, we also urge a substantial increase in funding for these areas in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill.

The technologies now arriving will shape the economy, national security, and American life for decades. Congress should be able to understand them before it legislates. Restoring OTA is the first step.

Sincerely,

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President & CEO, Foundation for American Innovation

Daniel Correa
CEO, Federation of American Scientists

Daniel Schuman
Executive Director, American Governance Institute

Victoria Houed
Executive Director, Ready State Labs

Ian Mair
CEO, FAI Action

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[1] For more on OTA's history and work, see this fact sheet: https://www.thefai.org/posts/one-pager-ota
[2] OTA's FY 1995 appropriation was $21.97 million (Pub. L. 103-283), about $48 million in 2026 dollars.

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Issue One

Data Transfer Initiative

Bipartisan Policy Center Action

Chamber of Progress

Open Markets Institute

Government Information Watch

Public Knowledge

TechFreedom

Code for America

Free Government Information (FGI)

Recoding America Action

Americans for Responsible Innovation

POPVOX Foundation

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Project On Government Oversight (POGO)

Encode AI

American Institute of Biological Sciences

Surgical Training Institute

Southeastern Center of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases