

MAKING THE HOUSE MORE ACCESSIBLE TO THE
DISABILITY COMMUNITY

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS
OF THE
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MAKING THE HOUSE MORE ACCESSIBLE TO THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY

THURSDAY, MAY 27, 2021

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

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 11:00 a.m., via Zoom, Hon. Derek Kilmer [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Kilmer, Perlmutter, Phillips, Williams of Georgia, Timmons, Rodney Davis of Illinois, Van Duyne, and Joyce.

The CHAIRMAN. With that, I will bang the virtual gavel, and the committee will come to order.

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

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes to give an opening statement. I promise not to use all 5.

Over the past few weeks, this committee has held a series of hearings generally focused on steps Congress can take to build a strong and inclusive workforce. The witnesses that we have heard from have shared some great ideas for recruiting talented interns and staff. They have also helped us understand what Congress can do better when it comes to retaining and promoting staff who reflect a diversity of histories, experiences, and views.

Putting these ideas into practice is wholly consistent with the doctrines on which the People's House are based. The Framers envisioned a body of Representatives that would reflect the diverse views of the American people, and diverse staff help Members process and understand these views in ways they might otherwise miss.

A governing system designed to give voice to the people depends on the active participation of people. If Members are to transform public opinion into public policy, they need to hear from the people they represent.

Engaged constituents routinely meet with their Representatives and staff. They send emails, make phone calls, and attend town-halls. They also follow committee and floor activity, either in person or online. Their ability to access their government in multiple ways gives them voice.

But constituent access to Congress is not universal. The physical barriers to access are many and vary across the Capitol complex. Small elevators, steep steps, heavy doors, and tight spaces are, unfortunately, hallmarks of this institution.

(1)

Digital accessibility is also a challenge. Individuals who are visually or hearing impaired currently cannot access congressional websites and live streamed proceedings in any consistent way.

This reality conflicts with the Framers' vision of the People's House. The right of equal access to Congress applies to every American.

Last year, members of this committee sponsored and passed a resolution that included language to address the equal access challenges persons with disabilities face when working for, visiting, or interacting with Congress.

Since then, the House has made progress toward making the proceedings and functions of Congress accessible to all Americans. This committee will continue to partner with the offices responsible for implementing these recommendations to make sure the good work continues.

Part of that work is to publicly highlight why these issues are so important, and that is what the committee intends to do today.

The issue of access is central to the daily work of Congress. Staff play a key role in this work, and if they are unable to do their jobs efficiently and effectively due to insufficient accommodations, they will leave the Hill for organizations that are better prepared to set them up for success. Congress can and should do more to prevent such losses.

Unequal access presents recruitment challenges as well. Internships are the main pipeline to careers on the Hill, but they remain out of reach for many individuals with disabilities. Requiring accommodations should not be disqualifying, but in reality it often is.

I want to make a quick public service announcement here. The Office of Congressional Accessibility Services can help offices with the technical and in-person support interns with disabilities need so that they are able to do their jobs and get the same experience as every other intern on the Hill.

The daily work and proceedings of Congress also rely upon public input, and that is why it is so important for the legislative branch to be equally accessible to all Americans. Physical and digital barriers should not prevent people with disabilities from having a voice in the legislative process.

The bottom line is that a modern Congress is one that welcomes and accommodates every American.

Making Congress more accessible to persons with disabilities is a process, and today we are joined by a panel of experts who are going to help us understand why investing in this process is so important. I am looking forward to hearing their recommendations for what Congress can do better.

And I would like to now invite Vice Chair Timmons to share some opening remarks as well.

Mr. TIMMONS. Hey, good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I would like to especially thank Congressman Langevin for taking time out of his busy schedule to speak with us.

Over the last several hearings this committee has held, we have focused a lot on staff capacity and how to recruit and retain a talented and diverse workforce to make Congress work better for the American people.

As I said last week, when we talk about modernizing Congress we are talking about investing in and developing a diverse workforce that accurately reflects the communities we represent. This includes a very important community, those with disabilities.

At each step in the public policymaking process here in the House our constituents can actively participate, whether it be meeting with Members on specific issues, attending committee hearings, or watching debate and votes on the House floor. Or, as we have seen over the last year, constituents can participate in this process virtually.

However, there remains a real challenge to many Americans when it comes to engaging in the legislative process.

Part of this committee's mission is making Congress more effective and efficient on behalf of the American people. This includes ensuring that those with disabilities can actively participate in the policymaking process.

The United States Capitol is more than 200 years old. Aside from being located on a hill, which presents natural challenges, there are other obvious physical barriers as well: narrow halls and doorways, steep, winding steps.

There remain other challenges for those with disabilities. Those who are blind or visually impaired may not be able to access information from congressional websites; and those who are deaf or hard of hearing are not able to follow live committee hearings when there is no closed captioning available.

On that note, I am pleased that in today's important hearing we are able to provide closed captioning for those watching.

I am looking forward to our discussion today about ways that we can improve accessibility in the House and make Congress work better for our constituents. A modern Congress is one that is accessible to and accommodates all Americans.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Vice Chair Timmons.

Today, we are joined by several expert witnesses.

Witnesses are reminded that your oral testimony will be limited to 5 minutes, and, without objection, your written statements will be made part of the record.

Our first witness today is our colleague Representative Jim Langevin, who serves as co-chair of the Bipartisan Disability Caucus.

Mr. Langevin, we may have to invite you back for our hearing on cybersecurity later in the year, but we are thrilled you could join us this morning. And you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to recognize you and the ranking member. Thank you for holding this hearing. I am honored to be here to contribute my thoughts. As well as the entire Modernization Committee. I just want to recognize you all for the work you are doing and thank you for having me.

So as many of you know, I am the first quadriplegic to serve as a Member of Congress. And as a founding co-chair of the Bipartisan Disability Caucus, accessibility of the Capitol complex has al-

ways been a priority for me, because the Hallowed Halls of Congress are where visitors from all across the country come to interact with their Representatives, listen to political discourse, and track legislation that can significantly impact their lives and their livelihoods.

So today I am going to briefly touch on three areas where I believe we can improve, the first of which is physical accessibility.

So physical accessibility of the Capitol complex is something that I think about daily, not by choice, but really out of necessity. The Architect of the Capitol staff, I have to say, have always worked with me to remove barriers, with no better example than the reference to install a lift system on the House floor at the Speaker's rostrum to make the Speaker's rostrum accessible.

However, physical barriers in the Capitol, such as inadequate signage, lack of accessible bathrooms, and improper curb cuts, and also lack of things like automatic door openers, still remain, and is a fact that I am reminded of whenever there is a joint hearing in a room that I am not familiar with and, obviously, the accessibility challenges come up, obviously, once again.

So we need to ensure that the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights completes timely, biennial ADA inspection reports, as required by the Congressional Accountability Act. We also need to improve funding to remove barriers identified in those reports so that we can guarantee that constituents and advocates who travel great distances to make their voices heard can actually enter the room to do so.

Accessible communication is another area where the House, I believe, could be doing better. In an ideal world, each hearing, briefing, press conference, or other event would have Communication Access Realtime Translation—or CART, as it is known—services or sign language interpreters provided.

However, these services are generally utilized only upon request, and when requested, staff often don't know where to go to ensure that they are provided.

Additionally, we must continue working to bring congressional websites up to date with accessibility standards, which requires two main components. That is accessible website design and uploading content in accessible formats.

Which brings me to the third area, and that is staff training.

So many House staff are simply not familiar with disability rights or accessibility services and procedures. So by requiring staff to have accessibility training, we can help press staff put out communications in an accessible manner, enable administrative staff to handle internal and external accommodation requests properly, and ensure staff with disabilities know where to request an accommodation without fear of it impacting their job.

The bottom line is that we must continue working to weave accessibility into the foundation of the House of Representatives instead of remedying accessibility concerns only when they are brought to our attention.

If we focus on the three areas that I have discussed—physical accessibility, accessible communications, and staff training—we can, I believe, make great progress as an organization.

I appreciate the progress that we have made so far, but clearly more can be done and needs to be done, and I hope we can get there together.

So, with that, I appreciate your time, and I look forward to working with you towards a more inclusive House.

Thank you. I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Congressman Langevin. I want to be sensitive to your time. I don't know if you are able to stand for any questions or if you have got to dash?

Mr. LANGEVIN. Sure. I have time for a couple if there are any.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me just ask members of the committee, any questions for Congressman Langevin?

Go ahead, Vice Chair Timmons.

Mr. TIMMONS. Congressman Langevin, thank you so much. If there was one, your number one issue that needs to be changed on the Hill, what would it be?

Mr. LANGEVIN. So as I mentioned, the access to interpreters or realtime broadcasting of the translation of what is said at the hearings would be important.

The other thing is the automatic door openers. As you and I both know, those doors can be quite heavy, some of them.

Some of them are at offices, but some of them were designed to be, basically, fire doors. If they are not open, for example, and I don't have somebody with me, there is no way I am opening that door and getting through it.

So if it is happening to me, it is happening to members of the general public if they are trying to navigate the Capitol complex themselves.

But also, again, highlighting the staff training is really important, just knowing where to turn and know that there are resources out there and they can get help.

But think of just maybe interns that answer the phone or the staff assistants that are handling the calls that come into the office. If there is turnover and they haven't been trained or informed that these services even exist, how are they going to tell the public about it?

Mr. TIMMONS. Sure. Thank you so much.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you.

Mr. TIMMONS. We will do everything we can to get on top of that.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you for the question, though, Vice Chair Timmons.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Perlmutter, did I see you have a hand up? And I saw you, Mr. Davis.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. I just wanted to thank the gentleman from Rhode Island for his testimony today and for being a champion on this subject, both for himself, but for the disability community as a whole.

And so I don't have any questions. I always look to Jim for advice on this subject and many others. So thanks for his testimony.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Perlmutter.

Mr. Davis.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And hey, Jim. You know, I have always wanted to question you, so I hope you don't mind a few off-topic questions.

But, hey, in all seriousness, I want to know are you getting contacted by the Architect of the Capitol on a regular basis or their employees about suggestions and upgrades that still may need to be done around the Capitol?

And also, what is the next, besides the automatic door openers, when you look at the outer grounds, what do you think needs to be done next to help the disability community and those like yourself as we see an ever-growing number of those who are disabled get elected to Congress, too?

Mr. LANGEVIN. So thanks for the question, Rodney.

And, yeah, we have pretty good communications with the Architect of the Capitol's office. And by and large, they have been very responsive.

I think things have just taken a lot longer to get where we need to get. I kind of joked around that—and it was reality—that when I first got to Congress, basically, they were in the process, this process of renovating the committee rooms and subcommittee rooms. And so, basically, they would make accessible those committees that I was assigned to.

And so, of course, I said, well, maybe I should, as a freshman, get on the Appropriations Committee then and they can make that one accessible first. But really that is what they were doing, is going room by room, hearing room by hearing room.

So it was helpful and it got the job done, and they continue to progress. I don't think all of the committee rooms are done yet in terms of making the rostrums accessible, but they are getting there. So it is just accelerating that timeline.

And I am trying to think of the outside the complex. There are curb cuts that either—more curb cuts are needed in certain places. They may not be in the right spot. And so you have got to go way down somewhere to actually find a curb cut and then come all the way back.

At least the curb cut is there, so that is one good thing. But when it becomes onerous to kind of go out of your way to get to one and waste time, we all know that time is precious on the Hill, and so that is just one of a couple things that come to mind.

But I do give a lot of credit to the Architect of the Capitol's office. They have been very receptive from the very beginning. It is just one of those things that you can only get to so many things, I suppose. We just need to accelerate the timeline.

Mr. DAVIS. Well, thanks Jim. I appreciate it. And keep in touch if you have any suggestions on curb cuts that we might be able to be helpful with.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Davis. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Langevin, do you have time for one more?

Mr. LANGEVIN. Sure, if we could do one more, that would be great.

The CHAIRMAN. You bet.

Mr. Phillips.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Langevin, in 2 years in Congress I have never said I would like to associate myself with someone's remarks, but today I am going to do so. I want to associate myself with everybody's remarks.

Gratitude to you for your testimony and your service in Congress. I know how tough it must be here, and I want to attract more of the best and brightest of all capabilities and physical abilities.

And I wonder, based on your perception, is there a sense in the disabled community in the country that Congress is inaccessible physically and otherwise?

And if so, is there anything that we can do beyond the physical improvements to the complex that might make this a more welcoming place?

Mr. LANGEVIN. Yeah. And so the Office of Accessibility Services, I think, it is a really important office, and we want to make sure that word gets out there about them.

There are disability advocate organizations that I am involved with, the National Organization on Disability, for example.

And, in addition to accessibility suggestions that they make, they also—obviously, there are things that they look to, to see being done to make society in general more accessible and being able to live in the community. The Supreme Court Olmstead decision, for example, that people with disabilities have a right to live actively, independently in their communities.

We haven't quite reached that goal yet as a country, but it is a worthy goal that I am bound and determined in my time in Congress to see us get closer to achieving. It just takes time and effort, and we need to keep pushing the envelope.

Mr. PHILLIPS. I appreciate that.

I just want, to my colleagues, and we have spoken a lot about interns, and I think we can make a special effort to attract interns with physical disabilities to Congress to create a pipeline, something I think we could give a little bit of attention to.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you for that comment, by the way. You are spot on, on that comment.

The one thing that is always a challenge is finding that pipeline and having people with disabilities know that they are welcome to apply for the job and hopefully actually get the job. But there doesn't seem to be that pipeline that we would hope for.

I think the intern program is a great way to do that. First of all, it allows someone with a disability to kind of get a feel for the job and say, hey, you know, yeah, this is something that I can do and that I like.

And it also allows the potential employer to see what reasonable accommodations are all about, and it is not onerous accommodations, it is reasonable accommodations.

And so just a thought that you raise a very good point. I wanted to associate myself with your remarks. So thank you.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Right back at you. And good to see you. Thanks so much.

Mr. LANGEVIN. You, too.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Langevin, you have been very generous with your time and with your expertise. And I just want to thank you

for your partnership to this committee and for your leadership on these issues.

Thanks so much.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you very much. I look forward to further discussions on the topic and others.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks so much.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. With that, we are next joined by Phoebe Ball. Ms. Ball serves as disability counsel on the House Education and Labor Committee.

She has spent her professional career working on issues related to disability law and is a published policy researcher in the areas of employment, asset development, work incentives, self-determination, and benefit programs for individuals with disabilities and has gained a national reputation as an expert in the area of guardianship.

Ms. Ball was a staff attorney with Disability Rights Florida for 7 years, moved to the Washington, D.C., area in 2014 to become the legislative affairs specialist with the National Council on Disability, an independent Federal agency that advises the President, Congress, and other Federal officials and entities on policies and programs affecting Americans with disabilities.

Ms. Ball left NCD to join the staff of the Ed and Labor Committee in 2019 and frequently meets with stakeholders and advocates on issues related to disability policy.

Ms. Ball, you are now recognized for 5 minutes to give an oral presentation of your testimony.

STATEMENTS OF PHOEBE BALL, DISABILITY COUNSEL FOR THE HOUSE EDUCATION AND LABOR COMMITTEE, ON BEHALF OF THEMSELVES; HEATHER ANSLEY, ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA (PVA); JUDY BREWER, DIRECTOR OF WEB ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVE (WAI) AT THE WORLD WIDE WEB CONSORTIUM (W3C); JOHN UELMEN, GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE OFFICE OF CONGRESSIONAL WORKPLACE RIGHTS

STATEMENT OF PHOEBE BALL

Ms. BALL. Thank you so much, Chairman Kilmer.

Good morning, everyone, and Vice Chair Timmons and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you so much for having me here today to offer my perspective on the accessibility of Congress.

Although I am currently working from home, I have spent a great deal of time navigating the Halls of Congress and the House and Senate office buildings. In addition to my experiences as a wheelchair user, I also have several hidden disabilities that both inform my work on disability policy and occasionally necessitate accommodations to enable me to succeed in my work.

Providing physical and programmatic access, reasonable workplace accommodations, and engaging with staff and members of the public with disabilities in ways that are respectful, open, inclusive, and offer a safe work environment are the keys to ensuring that

Congress is accessible to people with disabilities, whether they are staffers, members of the public, or Members of Congress.

The work of Congress takes place in buildings that were designed and built long before the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed. There is a reason that the image of disabled activists crawling up the Capitol steps resonated so deeply with the American people and led to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. It was a visual demonstration of how we have been barred from participating in society and the democratic process.

While my office and the common spaces where the Ed and Labor Committee staff work are all accessible, there are still many challenges that are largely the result of working in buildings that predate the ADA.

Getting from one building to another through a series of tunnels that connects the House and Senate office buildings is especially challenging.

After 5 months on the job, I was just starting to learn the route from my office in Rayburn to the Senate buildings where I frequently met with Senate colleagues. This route involved several elevators, including at least one freight elevator, a sloping hall that was great fun in a manual wheelchair, and a nifty subway that is only accessible on the Senate side.

It also involved a treasure hunt of sorts, following signs that said “accessible route to the Senate.” These were helpful, but definitely could be bigger and easier to follow.

The first few months, I got turned around a lot, including a few minutes in a hallway that I am pretty sure was haunted.

While I acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of the Architect of the Capitol to mark accessible paths, better signage is still needed in some areas regarding accessible paths, exits, and, critically, directions to accessible bathrooms.

As renovations occur, wherever possible barriers should be removed and individuals who use wheelchairs can get from point A to point B using the same pathways as our nondisabled colleagues. Bathrooms should be renovated to ensure that there is at least one accessible stall in every bathroom and that other ADA-compliant features are in place.

I would like to take a minute to talk about doors. Representative Langevin already referenced this, but these can be a real barrier for a wheelchair user.

The double leaf doors are only wide enough for a wheelchair when both are open and at least one able-bodied and tall person needs to work several latches to open both doors. These doors need to be altered so that both doors open easily, preferably automatically.

Getting out the door in an emergency is equally important. Staff and members with disabilities need to be at the table making emergency management plans and staff need to know how to interact with the public and have training so that they can assist people with disabilities in emergencies.

Learning how to talk about disability can help break down barriers, too. While there is a diversity of opinion on how we speak about disability, I prefer to use “identity-first” language. I am a

disabled woman, not a person with a disability who happens to be a woman. Both disabled and woman are essential to my identity.

Some people use “person-first” language and that is fine, too. What are not fine are euphemisms, including “differently abled,” “special needs,” and outdated terms such as “handicapped.”

There are also attitudinal barriers. I have sometimes been greeted by congressional staff with panic, obvious discomfort, and occasionally condescension.

Whether these barriers are intentional or unintentional, they are unacceptable and some basic disability awareness training can help as long as the training doesn’t include disability simulations, which can reinforce stereotypes.

Luckily, the Committee on Education and Labor was very aware of the need to make my office’s common spaces accessible. This should be the experience of all staff with disabilities, who must have options among a range of office equipment and furniture that will meet their access needs.

As Representative Langevin said, public events, such as hearings and markups, need to be accessible, particularly to the deaf community.

Websites are public spaces and need to meet 508 and web content accessibility guidelines and use plain language whenever possible, which will make websites more usable by intellectually disabled members of the public and everyone else.

As remote work is likely to be an important option even after this pandemic finally ends, especially as an accommodation for staff with disabilities, remote platforms need to be accessible.

I also would just like to mention that it is really important to remember that accommodations need to be made for folks with mental health disabilities as well.

I was recently diagnosed with depression and I have a learning disability and several other hidden disabilities. Managers and supervisors need to understand that they need to make accommodations to these types of disabilities, in addition to the visible disabilities.

Congress is a high-pressure environment where the American people must come first, but the ADA doesn’t require fundamental alteration of that dynamic. But barriers to access, denials of reasonable accommodation, and ignorant or disrespectful attitudes about disability should never be tolerated and are impediments to recruiting and retaining a diverse congressional workforce.

The mission of this committee is more important than ever as we consider whether we are just going to return to business as usual or if we are going to make the People’s House work better for everyone.

Thank you so much, and I look forward to questions.

[The statement of Ms. Ball follows:]

**Written Testimony Phoebe Ball, Disability Policy Counsel
House Committee on Education and Labor
Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
Re: Making the House More Accessible to the Disability Community
U.S. House of Representatives
May 27, 2021**

Good morning Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for having me here today to offer my perspective on the accessibility of Congress. I am a wheelchair user who has worked as Disability Counsel for the Committee on Education and Labor for about a year and a half. Before that, I worked as the legislative affairs specialist for the National Council on Disability for five years. Although much of my tenure as staff for the Committee has been during the pandemic where I've been working from home, I have spent a great deal of time navigating the halls of Congress and the House and Senate office buildings. In addition to my experiences as a wheelchair user, I also have several hidden disabilities that both inform my work and occasionally necessitate accommodations to enable me to succeed in my work.

As a disabled woman who has been engaged in disability rights work for more than two decades, it's important for me to take this opportunity in this very public forum, to talk about the fact that disability is central to my identity, and that it matters how we discuss disability as we are doing here to today. Euphemisms such as "differently abled" or "special needs" are both inaccurate and uncomfortable—I'm a disabled woman and the word "disabled" is an important identifier that defines me as much as my gender, my race or any other central part of my identity. You may also notice that I don't stick to "person-first" language which until fairly recently has been the way polite people talk about disability. Many of us in the disability community have moved away from always using that language to describe ourselves and each other, because it implies that disability is appended to the person in an incidental way when for many of us it is central to our identity. While there are different views on how to talk about disability even within the disability community, a good rule of thumb is to avoid euphemisms and listen to people with disabilities themselves and follow their cues.

Given that the oldest of the Congressional office buildings were built more than 80 years before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, there are some challenges to navigating the spaces where I spend my day when I'm not relegated to my home office because of a global pandemic. However, even before my first day of work for the Committee, I was answering questions about the width and height of my chair to ensure that my office, my desk, and even the common spaces I would need to navigate were accessible to me. Although there are still challenges to navigating a wheelchair through the old buildings on the Hill, the fact that my supervisors on the Committee had the forethought to consult with the Architect of the Capitol about my needs in terms of accessibility and to make changes to ensure access, was a clear signal that the Committee valued me as an employee and it also signaled a willingness to work with me to ensure access and provide accommodations I might need to perform the essential functions of my job or to enjoy the benefits or privileges of my employment on an equal basis with my coworkers.

Although my most obvious disability is using a wheelchair, that is probably the disability that complicates my working life the least—partly because of the long history of Congress passing laws that require the removal of architectural barriers to access by people with disabilities, starting with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968.¹ There are some short-cuts in the Congressional office buildings that I can't take--particularly the escalators--and while the subway is neat, it is only partially accessible, but for the most part getting around is not a big problem for me personally. However, little things can get in the way and a simple act of leaving out a chair at the end of an aisle can make room for a person in a wheelchair without the fuss of moving furniture. Additionally, the Committee has one of the relatively few offices on the Hill that has an automatic door opener, and sometimes it even works. However, much as I appreciate the elegance and antiquity of old buildings, many of the hearing rooms and many offices have double doors that are only wide enough for a wheelchair when both are open, and opening both requires an able-bodied person or two to work several latches in order to provide access to a person in a wheelchair. Where possible, doors should be altered to comply with Access Board requirements so that a person in a wheelchair or who has other disabilities can open the door without assistance either using an automatic button or door pulls that can be operated with a loose grip or closed fist and not requiring more than 5 pounds of pressure to open.²

Where changing these doors is cost-prohibitive or potentially damaging to the historic nature of these buildings, ensuring that staff are trained in how to open doors and also have enough training in “disability etiquette” not to display overt panic when a person in a wheelchair or any other disability seeks entrance to an office can go a long way towards providing disabled members of the public with access to Congressional offices. Whenever possible, staff should avoid opening doors in such a way that the person in a wheelchair has to enter the room under an arm—no matter how tall the staff person is, that's just awkward.

In addition to physical access, there are improvements that could be made in terms of access to people with sensory disabilities, including members of the blind and Deaf communities. One simple thing that I don't actually have because it does not seem to be standard feature of Congressional business cards, although it should be, is key information in braille on business cards. Even if you never hand your card to a blind person who uses braille, having braille on your business card sends an important message that you want information provided by your office to be accessible to everyone. Braille business cards make a strong positive statement about the staff person whose name is on the card and the office and Member they represent. Improving access to hearings, mark ups, briefings and other public events through the provision of real-time captioning and ASL interpreters for attendees, who may be staff with disabilities or members of the general public, would ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.³ Beyond basic compliance issues, these measures would encourage participation in these important Democratic processes by members of the Deaf community and the disability community at large. Additionally, captioning makes it easier for everyone to understand everything that is said at

¹ 90 P.L. 480, 82 Stat. 718

² <https://www.access-board.gov/aba/guides/chapter-4-entrances-doors-and-gates/>

³ 2 U.S.C.S. § 1311 *See also* 28 CFR §36.303

these events. Finally, such steps would establish an atmosphere of access and welcoming to the disability community in general. Although I spectacularly failed at mastering ASL as my foreign language in college and had to switch to something else to preserve my GPA, when I see that interpreters have been provided, I understand that access is a priority and I appreciate it as a member of the disability community.

As all of our lives have moved online during the pandemic, the paramount importance of online access has become increasingly clear. The ADA and Rehabilitation Act provided accessibility standards for physical government spaces, and in 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 by adding Section 508 which specifically required federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. It has never been more critical for Congressional offices and Committees to ensure that websites and all of the content on them or linked to them meets the Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Standards promulgated by the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board⁴, pursuant to section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,⁵ and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1, as promulgated by the World Wide Web Consortium.⁶ Additionally, when creating online content for social media platforms, “alt-text” descriptions for the blind and captioning of any streaming content are critical ways to ensure access.

In some ways, the things I’ve outlined so far are the “low hanging fruit” of ensuring accessibility and reasonable accommodations in the workplace. Although I’ve referred to my physical disability and the fact that I use a wheelchair because I was born with Spina Bifida, I actually have numerous other less obvious disabilities, some of which are not directly related to Spina Bifida. In addition to using a wheelchair, I am a below knee amputee. I was also born with hydrocephalous—water on the brain—which means I have a shunt that removes spinal fluid from my brain. Although the exact connection to hydrocephalous is unclear, it’s likely that it explains why I was diagnosed with a severe math learning disability in college and why my sense of time and direction are both terrible. This propensity to get lost and not be on time has posed some unique challenges for me as a staffer, especially before the pandemic. Finally, Spina Bifida is commonly associated with a loss of bladder and bowel control, so I have a cecostomy tube which enables me to manage my bowel incontinence but also means that my morning routine takes an extra 45 minutes to sometimes several hours longer than most people. I also have a urostomy because my bladder was removed following stage 3 bladder cancer a few years ago. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the relatively recent cancer diagnosis being immediately followed by a global pandemic and subsequent lock down in relative isolation with only my teenaged daughter for company, I’ve recently been diagnosed with depression and started taking an anti-depressant.

Although I personally have not needed to formalize an accommodation for each of these hidden disabilities, each may be a disability covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

⁴ 36 C.F.R. part 1194

⁵ 29 U.S.C. § 794d

⁶ <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>

to the same extent as my use of a wheelchair, although the disability is not as obvious and neither is the accommodation in some cases. As a 47 year old woman with a law degree and decades of experience working in the field of disability, it is pretty easy for me to talk about these disabilities with my employer and make sure that we begin the interactive process to develop an accommodation. However, most of my colleagues are younger and just beginning their careers. Although they may have an impairment that limits a major life activity, they may not think of their impairment as a disability or understand their rights under the ADA. Even if they know they have a right to an accommodation, they may not know what accommodation they need or how to approach their supervisor with such a request. Especially with the increases in anxiety, depression and substance abuse disorders that have occurred during the pandemic, it is going to be up to Members, staff directors, and others in supervisory roles to understand when they need to commence the interactive process to determine whether a staff member may be entitled to an accommodation.

The Job Accommodation or JAN is an excellent resource for managers and staff alike. This federally-funded resource provides information about workplace accommodations and how to ensure that employees with disabilities receive effective accommodations that will enable them to succeed in their jobs. According to JAN, when the need for a particular accommodation is not obvious, managers should engage in the following steps to ensure that employees get the accommodations they need.

1. Recognizing the Request for an Accommodation: although employees may not invoke the ADA or ask for a reasonable accommodation specifically, in response to any indication that an employee is having a problem related to a medical condition, the supervisor should consider whether the employee is making a request for reasonable accommodation under the ADA.
2. Gathering Information: once an accommodation request has been made, the supervisor should gather information necessary to process the request, including documentation of the disability and need for accommodation if these are not obvious. However, it's important to only request medical documentation that may be necessary to determine whether the employee has a disability and needs an accommodation. Employers are not entitled to the employee's entire medical or mental health history just because they request an accommodation.
3. Exploring Accommodation Options: once the disability and how it may be causing a challenge at work is identified, employers should be ready to explore accommodation options. Although the employee may be the best source of information, it may make sense to loop a medical professional into the conversation. In some cases, the Architect of the Capitol can be a great source of information as can resources such as the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights and the Office of Congressional Accessibility Services. Finally, the JAN website contains a great deal of information regarding specific accommodations and they have consultants available to provide detailed suggestions.
4. Choosing an Accommodation: once the available accommodations have been explored, the employer chooses an accommodation among any equally effective alternatives, although this should be done in consultation with the employee. However, the process doesn't conclude once an accommodation is in place; accommodations can and should be

periodically reviewed to determine if they are effective and whether there may be other alternatives that would be preferable.

5. **Implementation:** once an accommodation has been chosen, it needs to be implemented. Equipment that is part of an accommodation may need to be installed and the employee trained in its use. Accommodations involving a schedule or policy change may need to be communicated to others who need to assist with implementation. If the accommodation is a reassignment to a new position, the employee may need time to acclimate to the new position.
6. **Monitoring:** as noted above, an important part of the interactive process is monitoring whether the accommodation continues to be effective and whether there have been changes in the workplace or the employee's disability that merit a change in the accommodation.⁷

It's hard for me to gauge whether employees have sufficient access to information about their rights to accommodation and whether managers have sufficient training to engage in the interactive process outlined above, especially since the majority of my time working for the Committee has been during the pandemic where I've been working from home. However, I suspect that more could be done to ensure that managers are trained in the steps outlined above and that staff could be better informed about their right to ask for reasonable accommodations.

For me personally, working from home has ameliorated some of the issues for which I may have needed an accommodation during normal times. For example, I occasionally experience problems with my urostomy that necessitate, to be frank, a shower and a change of clothes. This doesn't happen often, but if I'm already home when it does, the degree to which it interrupts my schedule and ability to work is obviously less than if I needed to address the situation while in the workplace. As we transition back to working in-person following this pandemic, some of us with newly acquired disabilities related to "long-haul" Covid-19 or mental health issues related to the trauma that we've all experienced to varying degrees, we should take this opportunity to examine these processes and make sure that Congress is a welcoming and accessible place that is able to accommodate employees with disabilities, if for no other reason than to benefit fully from the talents and perspective these employees bring to the table.

Congress is a high-pressure environment where the needs of the American people must come first. The ADA doesn't require a fundamental alteration of this dynamic. However, it does require supervisors to have enough understanding of disabilities, especially ones that may be less obvious, such as learning disabilities and psychiatric disabilities, to engage in the interactive process so that staff feel comfortable discussing these disabilities, knowing they will get the accommodations they need. Failing to do so may not only violate anti-discrimination law, but it also adds unnecessary stress and difficulty that will inevitably increase the level of burn-out and high turn-over that have consistently made it difficult to recruit and retain a diverse Congressional staff workforce. The mission of this Committee is more important than ever as we

⁷ <https://askjan.org/topics/interactive.cfm>

consider whether we are just going to return to business as usual following this pandemic or commit ourselves to making the “people’s house” work better for everyone.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Ball.

Our next witness is Heather Ansley. Ms. Ansley is associate executive director at the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

She also works to promote collaboration between disability organizations and veterans service organizations by serving as a co-chair of the Consortium for Citizens With Disabilities Veterans Task Force. Additionally, she serves as an officer for CCD's Board of Directors.

Prior to joining PVA, Ms. Ansley served as vice president of VetsFirst, a program of United Spinal Association, and as the director of policy and advocacy for the Lutheran Services in America-Disability Network.

Ms. Ansley, you are now recognized for 5 minutes to give an oral presentation of your testimony.

STATEMENT OF HEATHER ANSLEY

Ms. ANSLEY. Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and members of the Select Committee, Paralyzed Veterans of America, or PVA, would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding our views on ways to improve disability access to the facilities and activities of the House of Representatives.

PVA is a congressionally chartered veteran service organization whose members are all veterans who have acquired a spinal cord injury or disorder, and the overwhelming number of them use assistive devices for mobility, such as wheelchairs, scooters, and canes.

Having the opportunity to participate in visits with Members of Congress, testify before congressional committees and roundtables, and attend hearings and briefings, whether in person or on Capitol Hill, is an important part of our democracy.

For veterans, including those who have incurred disabilities as a result of their service to our Nation in the protection of our freedom, ensuring that disability is not a barrier to participating in their government is an important duty of Congress. If all people with disabilities do not have proper access to their legislators, policies will not effectively reflect their needs and perspectives.

Barriers to Capitol Hill can start at the curb. Providing a designated drop-off or pickup zone near any accessible entrances would help to mitigate this barrier and also help people with disabilities to more easily identify the accessible building entrances and paths of travel.

The next barrier is often transiting security. Prior to the pandemic, the security process for wheelchair users was at times inconsistent.

Consistent security procedures must be developed and screening officers must be trained on proper procedures to ensure that visitors receive a fair screening that meets the security needs of Capitol Hill.

Once through security, navigating a House office building can be difficult due to the lack of signage to guide people with disabilities.

Improved signage that clearly identifies the accessible path of travel for people who use mobility devices would help them to be able to more easily locate offices and committee rooms.

Also, elevators can be quite small and not fully accessible to those who use wheelchairs and scooters.

Additional signage would help to steer them to bigger elevators that can more easily accommodate devices, particularly for people who use large power chairs. Also, when renovations are made, small elevators should be replaced.

According to advocates for people who are blind or low vision, Braille signage is falling into disrepair and needs to be maintained.

In addition, these advocates believe that Congress should continue providing services like Aria, which was previously provided for free to users in the various buildings on Capitol Hill. This was helpful to travel successfully from office to office.

Once arriving at a Member's office, additional barriers often make entering and navigating them difficult. Offices are often small and do not always allow easy access for people who use mobility devices.

Each congressional office should be modified to include push button access, particularly for those located in Rayburn. Office layouts should also be developed with a consideration of the needs of visitors and staff with disabilities who use assistive devices when feasible.

Members of Congress and their staff should also provide more information about how to access their offices and request accommodation. For example, when individuals identify as using a wheelchair, staff should proactively move furniture, if needed, and ensure entrance door access.

Staff should also develop and use checklists to ensure access to all of the events that they hold, and additionally should develop plans for detailing how they are going to address accessibility needs before those requests arrive.

Training should also be provided to congressional staff about how to interact with people who do not use speech to communicate or who appear to behave in a nontypical manner.

Providing initial and ongoing training for staff about how to interact with constituents and advocates with disabilities, including those with nonapparent disabilities, will help to ensure equal access for all.

Accessing the services available to the general public in House office buildings can also be difficult. Restrooms are not universally accessible for people who use mobility devices, and all restrooms should be renovated to provide at least one wheelchair-accessible stall. In addition, family restrooms would help those with disabilities who may require assistance.

Finally, the pandemic fundamentally changed the way that constituents and advocates have interacted with Capitol Hill. In-person meetings, hearings, roundtables, and briefings transformed to virtual events. The ability to participate virtually in these events has expanded the ability of people with disabilities to more easily participate.

As the Nation emerges from the pandemic, PVA believes that continued avenues for virtual participation in events is needed to ensure full access to the legislative process for people with disabilities who may experience travel, physical, and/or monetary barriers.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views on improving access. We look forward to answering any questions.
[The statement of Ms. Ansley follows:]

**STATEMENT OF HEATHER ANSLEY
ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA
BEFORE THE
HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS
ON "MAKING THE HOUSE MORE ACCESSIBLE TO THE DISABILITY
COMMUNITY"
MAY 27, 2021**

Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and members of the Select Committee, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding our views on ways to improve disability access to the facilities and activities of the House of Representatives. PVA is a congressionally chartered veterans service organization whose members are all veterans of the armed forces who have acquired a spinal cord injury or disorder (SCI/D). As a result, the overwhelming majority of our members use assistive devices for mobility, including wheelchairs, scooters, and canes. Although there have been improvements in physical access to House office buildings in recent years, barriers persist. PVA's testimony will address not only the experiences of those who use assistive devices for mobility but also those of other populations within the disability community. In addition to relaying those experiences, PVA's testimony will provide suggested solutions for improving access to the House's facilities and activities.

At the beginning of March 2020, PVA held its annual Advocacy/Legislation Seminar which brings to Washington, D.C. members from PVA's 33 chapters that serve veterans, their families, and their caregivers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. As part of the Seminar, PVA's members travel to Capitol Hill to visit with their members of Congress to share PVA's public policy priorities. This was the last opportunity that our members had to travel to Washington, D.C. to meet with their legislators prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Having the opportunity to participate in visits with members of Congress, testify before congressional committees and roundtables, and attend hearings and briefings whether in person or on Capitol Hill is an important part of our democracy. For veterans, including those who have incurred disabilities as a result of their service to our nation in the protection of our freedoms, ensuring that disability is not a barrier to participating in their government is an important duty of Congress. This is equally true for all people with disabilities. Without proper access to their legislators, policies will not effectively reflect the needs and perspectives of people with disabilities.

The Congressional Accountability Act of 1995 (Public Law 104-1) applied the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other civil rights and workplace laws to Congress. Early on, PVA worked with the newly established Office of Compliance (now known as the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights) to ensure the Capitol Hill Complex met ADA

requirements. Specifically, we were asked to assist in identifying barriers for the Office to include in its annual report to Congress. At times, the Office would coordinate with the Architect of the Capitol and the Office of Accessibility.

Coming to Capitol Hill for a congressional visit, hearing, or other event can present barriers for people with disabilities. These barriers start at the curb. For people who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices, taxis and rideshare vehicles may not be accessible. As a result, many wheelchair users drive to Capitol Hill. It can be difficult, however, to locate accessible parking in close proximity to the Capitol Complex. Providing accessible parking options would make it easier for wheelchair and scooter users to visit the Complex, including House office buildings. For those who arrive as passengers in lift equipped transportation or standard transportation but must transfer into a wheelchair on arrival, it can be difficult to locate a safe location to deploy a ramp or make a transfer. Providing a designated drop off or pick up zone near any accessible entrances would help to mitigate this barrier and also help people with disabilities to more easily identify the accessible building entrances and paths of travel.

Upon arriving at a House office building, the next barrier for many people with disabilities is going through security. Prior to the pandemic, the security process for wheelchair users was inconsistent. At times, wheelchair users would be passed through without any screening, screened with a security wand since the walkthrough metal detectors are not accessible, or subjected to an invasive pat down. To remove this barrier, consistent security procedures for people with disabilities must be developed and screening officers must be trained on proper processes to ensure that visitors receive a fair screening that meets the security needs of Capitol Hill.

PVA regularly works with other members of the disability community as part of our advocacy work. One disability advocacy group representing autistic people reported that officers often appear to have little or no knowledge about non-apparent disabilities. For example, participants in that group's training program have been harassed because a supporter of a different gender accompanied the person with a disability to the restroom. The group also stated that they are always vigilant about how things like stimming (repetitive behavior), sensory overload, or not being able to speak and respond to questions quickly will appear to officers. Ensuring that officers receive training on the needs of people with different types of disabilities, both apparent and non-apparent, will decrease anxiety about the security experience and end disparate treatment of people with disabilities.

Once through security, navigating a House office building can be difficult due to the lack of signage to guide people with disabilities. For example, it can be difficult for people with disabilities to know which routes are accessible for those who use assistive devices for mobility. Improved signage that clearly identifies the accessible path of travel for people who use wheelchairs, scooters, and other mobility devices would help them be able to more easily locate offices, committee rooms, and cafeterias.

Another accessibility issue can be navigating the tunnels between House office buildings. For example, the Longworth House Office Building accessible entrance (located on Independence Ave) is convenient for accessing both that building and the Rayburn House Office Building. However, it is difficult to travel from Longworth to Rayburn using the tunnels as the elevator bank directly inside the Independence Ave entrance only has one elevator to take a wheelchair user to the lowest level which connects to Rayburn. The other elevators in the bank take visitors to the level that requires using an escalator to access Rayburn. Because the needed elevator is also used for freight, that can cause additional delays. It would help visitors with mobility impairments if it were easier to call the proper elevator and if signage adequately conveyed the procedure needed to access Rayburn through the tunnels.

In other parts of the House office buildings, the elevators are quite small and not fully accessible to wheelchair and scooter users. Additional signage would help to steer wheelchair users to bigger elevators that can more easily accommodate large powerchairs and their caregivers, as appropriate. When renovations are made to House office buildings, small elevators should be replaced with ones that are more accessible for mobility device users.

According to advocates for people who are blind or low vision, braille signage is falling into disrepair and needs to be maintained. This signage is needed because finding offices is very difficult for these individuals. With that in mind, offices should do more to help blind or low vision visitors to find their offices. A helpful accommodation might be for a staffer to meet a visitor in the office building's main lobby.

Another accommodation to help blind and low-vision visitors travel successfully through the various buildings might be to continue providing services like Aira (a service that connects blind and low-vision people to trained, remotely-located agents). Aira was previously provided for free to users in the various buildings on Capitol Hill. This was helpful to travel successfully from office to office. Similarly, the provision of other way finding technology would also be useful.

Once arriving at a member's office, additional barriers often make it difficult for people with mobility impairments to access their Representative. Offices on the House side are often small and do not always allow easy access for people who use wheelchairs, scooters, or walkers. Sometimes coffee tables, chairs, and other furniture have to be moved to allow entry or maneuvering within the office. In Rayburn, the double door entrances are cumbersome and require assistance from staff as both must be opened to allow access. Each congressional office should be modified to include push button access, particularly for offices located in Rayburn. One PVA member reported that because she uses a large powerchair, meetings with members of Congress and their staff often had to be in the hallway because the office could not be navigated. Thus, office layouts should also be developed with a consideration of the needs of visitors (and staff) with disabilities who use assistive devices, when feasible.

Congressional offices should also provide more information about how to access their offices and request accommodations. This information can be provided on member websites and to those who make appointments and identify as people with disabilities. When individuals identify as needing accommodations, offices should proactively move furniture and ensure entrance door access. Members and their staff should also ensure that people with disabilities are accommodated at townhalls, listening sessions, and other events, including those in the district. This may mean the office needs to secure accessible parking at those events and provide CART (Computer Aided Real-Time Transcription) services or closed captioning and ASL. Offices should develop and use checklists to ensure access for all public events. Additionally, offices should develop plans detailing how they will address accessibility needs before requests arise.

Training should also be provided to congressional staff about how to interact with people who do not use speech to communicate or who may appear to behave oddly. An organization representing autistic people relayed that staff who answer the phones sometimes hang up on callers who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), because they think they are robocalls. Providing initial and ongoing training for staff about how to interact with constituents and advocates with disabilities will help to ensure equal access for these individuals.

Accessing the services available to the general public in House office buildings can also be difficult for people with disabilities. Restrooms are not universally accessible for people who use wheelchairs or scooters. All restrooms in House office buildings should be renovated to provide at least one wheelchair accessible stall in each bathroom. In addition, family restrooms would help those with disabilities who require assistance. For example, a PVA member expressed the difficulties she has in accessing restrooms because her caregiver is her husband. The ability to conveniently access a family restroom would make it easier for this woman veteran to visit Capitol Hill and participate in the legislative process. Water fountains also often do not meet access requirements and should be modified.

Congressional briefings and large meetings often take place in the Capitol Visitor Center. Facilities like the Capitol Visitor Center can be really loud and overwhelming for those with sensory processing issues. Quiet/sensory-free spaces are needed to help people who need to take a break and re-regulate.

An ongoing access challenge for people who are blind, low vision, or have limited dexterity is inaccessible web content, and Congress is not immune from this problem. Fortunately, many of the sites are at least partially accessible, but many still include challenges. For example, the forms required for constituents to reach out or make an appointment with a congressional office are often difficult to use with a screen reader. Additionally, there is a lot of variety in the formatting of sites. More consistency would be helpful for those who use screen readers to know where to find desired information.

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the way that constituents and advocates interact with legislators and their staff on Capitol Hill. In-person meetings,

hearings, roundtables, and briefings transformed to virtual events. The ability to participate virtually in these events expanded the ability of people with disabilities to more easily participate. For many people with disabilities, including PVA members, air travel is extremely difficult due to the lack of safe and effective assistance, frequent damage to assistive devices, and inaccessible aircraft. Thus, the ability to travel on short notice to Washington, D.C. can be quite difficult since air travel is not always accessible. Travel can also be cost prohibitive.

As the nation emerges from the pandemic, PVA believes that continued avenues for virtual participation in events is needed to ensure continued access to the legislative process for people with disabilities. Hearings, roundtables, and meetings benefit from the participation of people with disabilities. Due to travel, physical, and monetary barriers, virtual participation is sometimes the only way to ensure their full participation. We must not go back to requiring in-person access for these events.

Although virtual events can help to overcome some accessibility barriers, they can also present new access challenges. These challenges include the need to ensure that online platforms are accessible for those who use screen readers and who need communication-related accommodations. To ensure that these events are accessible to participants, offices should use checklists and follow best practices developed by the disability community.

PVA would once again like to thank the Select Committee for the opportunity to submit our views on improving access to the House of Representatives for people with disabilities. We look forward to working with the Committee and would be happy to answer any questions.

Information Required by Rule XI 2(g) of the House of Representatives

Pursuant to Rule XI 2(g) of the House of Representatives, the following information is provided regarding federal grants and contracts.

Fiscal Year 2021

Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events — Grant to support rehabilitation sports activities — \$455,700.

Fiscal Year 2020

Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events — Grant to support rehabilitation sports activities — \$253,337.

Fiscal Year 2019

Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events — Grant to support rehabilitation sports activities — \$193,247.

Disclosure of Foreign Payments

Paralyzed Veterans of America is largely supported by donations from the general public. However, in some very rare cases we receive direct donations from foreign nationals. In addition, we receive funding from corporations and foundations which in some cases are U.S. subsidiaries of non-U.S. companies.

Heather L. Ansley, Esq., MSW

Heather L. Ansley is the Associate Executive Director of Government Relations at Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA). Her responsibilities include managing the organization's efforts on Capitol Hill and working with the Administration to promote legislation and policies that ensure veterans with catastrophic disabilities receive the health care and benefits that they have earned and the civil rights protections that they deserve. She also works to promote collaboration between disability organizations and veterans service organizations and currently serves as the Immediate Past Chair of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD). CCD is the largest coalition of national organizations working together to advocate for federal public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. She also serves on the board of the Disability Rights Bar Association. Prior to joining PVA, Ms. Ansley served as Vice President of VetsFirst, a program of United Spinal Association, and as the Director of Policy and Advocacy for the Lutheran Services in America Disability Network. She also served as a Research Attorney for the Honorable Steve Leben with the Kansas Court of Appeals. Ms. Ansley holds a BA and MSW from the University of Missouri-Columbia and a JD from the Washburn University School of Law in Kansas.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks so much, Ms. Ansley.

Our next witness is Judy Brewer. Ms. Brewer directs the Web Accessibility Initiative at the World Wide Web Consortium. She is also a principal research scientist at MIT's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Lab.

Her work includes coordinating the development of accessibility standards, guidelines, and best practices for digital technologies, including the web, mobile, digital publishing, virtual reality, and other technologies that are converging on the web.

Ms. Brewer's current interests include expanding access to digital accessibility for people in underresourced regions and communities around the world, and exploring the potential of virtual meetings and gatherings to improve connections between people with disabilities and others.

Ms. Brewer, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JUDY BREWER

Ms. BREWER. Thank you. To the Honorable Chair Kilmer and Vice Chair Timmons and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about the importance of digital accessibility in modernizing Congress.

I direct the Web Accessibility Initiative, WAI, at the World Wide Web Consortium, W3C, the international standards body for the web. We are headquartered at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I have been working on accessibility for over three decades as a technology expert, as well as a person with a disability. My oral testimony summarizes my written testimony.

Digital accessibility is the design of technologies so that people with disabilities can use them, along with everyone else, whether their disabilities are auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, speech, or visual.

The scope and impact is broad. Digital accessibility enables constituents who are blind to find and comment on legislation that you are developing. It enables a staff member experiencing stress to smoothly navigate to a secure and private telehealth session. It enables a Congress person who is hard of hearing to follow witnesses' testimony by streaming captions in a video conference. It could allow students who are deaf or have low vision or difficulty with hand coordination to take a virtual tour of the Capitol with their classmates.

We count on accessibility thanks to the 30-year-old Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA. It is timely for congressional attention given that the pandemic has accelerated society's move from physical to virtual. COVID has, at the same time, put the digital disability divide into sharp relief.

The accepted worldwide standard for web accessibility is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, WCAG, which also sets a foundation for accessibility of mobile, publishing, and more.

WCAG is developed by the Web Accessibility Initiative at W3C with extensive contributions from industry, research, people with disabilities, and government. It is incorporated into Section 508 and cited for conforming to the ADA.

WAI also develops authoritative educational, explanatory, and technical materials for implementing WCAG.

This work is supported in part by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, Rehabilitation and Research at the Department of Health and Human Services, the European Commission, the Ford Foundation, WAI sponsors, and W3C member organizations. My remarks today are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of WAI's funders.

A vibrant and extensive business sector has evolved to address the need for development and evaluation of accessible digital technologies. Practical and operational issues in large decentralized organizations require a comprehensive and methodical approach. There is no silver bullet.

The 116th Congress resolution on modernizing Congress called for accessibility assessments of all House websites and apps. This is an important first step. It is also important to build awareness, set a centralized policy, select tools carefully, and conduct ongoing monitoring.

Examples of issues and approaches include it is important that documents be produced in accessible formats. Legacy documents may need significant remediation. It is important that tools for producing documents and websites are usable by staff with disabilities.

Tools that conform to a different standard, the Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines, ATAG, ensure that they can be used by people with disabilities and that they support production of accessible content.

Accessible templates and business processes for websites and applications and training, including for nontechnical staff writers, help achieve accessibility.

Procurement approaches from Section 508 of the Workforce Investment Act can help set clear expectations with vendors.

Turning back to the circumstances that are causing us to have a virtual rather than in-person hearing today, the pandemic has hit racial, cultural, and disability communities in a devastating way. It is more important than ever that we have equal opportunity to comment into public processes that impact our lives.

Everyone had to pivot to virtual modes with little preparation. People with disabilities had to pivot in especially difficult ways. We are now seeing progress through innovation driven by necessity.

People with disabilities do not want to lose this virtual access that has opened new doors during this difficult time. WAI is developing best practices to address accessibility of virtual, as well as hybrid events, events that are both in person and virtual in the future. I encourage Congress to support this emerging area of accessibility.

It is heartening to learn of interest by the bipartisan Select Committee on Modernization.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.

[The statement of Ms. Brewer follows:]

Statement of Judy Brewer
 Before the House Select Committee on Modernization of Congress
 Hearing on Making the House More Accessible to the Disability Community
 Thursday, May 27, 2021

To the Honorable Chair Kilmer, Vice-Chair Timmons, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about the importance of digital accessibility in modernizing Congress.

My name is Judy Brewer. I direct the Web Accessibility Initiative (known as “WAI”) at the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), which is the international standards body for the Web. We are headquartered at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where I’m a Principal Research Scientist. I have been working on accessibility for over three decades, as a technology expert as well as a person with a disability.

Digital accessibility is the design of technologies (including products, services, and environments) so that people with disabilities can use them – along with everyone else – whether their disabilities are auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, speech or visual. Designing for accessibility improves how technology works for the over 20% of the U.S. population with disabilities. It is a prolific driver of innovation for all.

The scope and impact of digital accessibility is broad:

1. Digital accessibility is what enables constituents who are blind to find and comment on legislation you’re developing, if your congressional website is accessible.
2. Digital accessibility is what enables a staff member who is stressed, or distracted, to smoothly navigate to a secure and private telehealth session.
3. Digital accessibility is what enables a congressperson who might be a bit hard of hearing to follow witness’ testimony via streaming captions in a video-conference.
4. Digital accessibility is what could allow students who are deaf, or who have low vision, or difficulty with hand coordination, to take the virtual tour of the US Capitol that’s on the Congressional website along with their classmates, then discuss their shared experience.
5. Digital accessibility is what can enable a veteran working a security detail, who has a prosthetic hand with capacitive touch sensing, to use the apps on her work-issued mobile phone.

Accessible technology has become part of the public environment that people with disabilities count on, thanks to the 30-year old Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which enables us to participate in and contribute to society on an equal basis with others. The public now expects accessibility when visiting their representatives online; also, those who serve the public in a congressional setting likewise require accessibility to do their jobs.

Digital accessibility is extremely timely for congressional attention, given that the COVID pandemic has accelerated society’s move from physical to virtual. But COVID has at the same

time put the digital disability divide into sharp relief, along with racial, gender and economic digital divides. Accessibility, though so often overlooked, is an essential part of achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion in a modern Congress.

The good news is that we know how to make the digital technologies that Congress uses accessible. In 2000, I described early efforts on web accessibility to the Subcommittee on the Constitution under House Judiciary. In 2010, I described the progress we had achieved on consensus standards for accessibility, and the impact that these standards were already having. The scenarios I described today are not only achievable, but are happening around the country, and the world.

It's possible that the process of making digital technologies accessible might seem daunting, especially in a decentralized environment such as Congress. However, decentralization of information technology management is common to many large organizations, and it is an addressable issue. The public and staff need a centralized assurance of accessibility; it can help to develop a centralized policy and centralized resources to meet this obligation, even if the bulk of content production remains decentralized.

The accepted worldwide standard of reference for web accessibility is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). These guidelines also set a foundation for accessibility of other technologies, including mobile, publishing, web of things, and more.

WCAG is developed by the Web Accessibility Initiative at W3C, with extensive contributions from industry, research, people with disabilities and government. WCAG has been incorporated by reference into Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act as amended by the Workforce Investment Act. It is also the digital accessibility standard most often cited for conforming to the ADA, and is the standard referenced by other US agencies. It is endorsed by the International Standards Organization (ISO), and has been taken up in over 40 countries around the world.

With the help of a broad international community of accessibility experts, WAI also develops an authoritative library of educational, explanatory and technical materials for implementing WCAG 2. These are also freely available from the W3C WAI website. We expand and update these resources as digital technologies advance.

This work is supported in part by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, Rehabilitation and Research at the Department of Health and Human Services; the European Commission; the Ford Foundation; WAI Sponsors; and W3C Member organizations. My remarks today are my own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of WAI's funders.

Additionally, a vibrant and extensive business sector has evolved to address the need for development and evaluation of accessible digital technologies. This includes many small, medium and large organizations providing services for specific aspects of accessibility, such as content design, document remediation, and evaluation of websites as well as mobile applications.

I would like to speak to the types of practical and operational issues that can come up in large organizations. Implementing accessibility requires a comprehensive and methodical approach; there is no silver bullet. The 116th resolution on modernizing Congress called for evaluation of

all House websites and apps to determine their level of accessibility. This is an essential first step; one needs to know where the barriers are, to be able to prioritize and plan how to address them.

However it is also important to plan for additional steps, using a project management approach, and to include steps such as building awareness, setting a clear policy, selecting authoring tools that support production of accessible content, and ongoing monitoring.

Here are a few examples of the types of issues that can arise, and, very briefly, some approaches to address these:

- Documents: It is important that all documents are produced and delivered in accessible formats. The digital publishing community, which has joined with W3C, calls this “born accessible,” and it is an effective and achievable approach. Please note though that for legacy documents that are in formats that are still not accessible, these may need a significant remediation effort, to convert these to accessible formats.
- Front end and back office: While the need for accessibility in the public-facing aspects of Congress may be most obvious, some congressional staff, in any and all roles, likely have disabilities as well, and congressional offices need to be prepared for this. It is therefore important that the tools for producing documents should be usable by people with disabilities. Fortunately, we also have guidelines that address this.
- Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines: Many types of software applications are used in creating, producing and publishing online content, ranging from content management systems (CMS), to image editors, to social media tools. Tools that conform to the Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines (ATAG) 2.0 can help achieve digital accessibility in two ways: by ensuring that the user interface of authoring tools is accessible to people with disabilities, and by helping support more efficient creation and production of accessible content, thereby reducing future effort and cost for retrofitting and remediation.
- Web sites: It is also important to consider accessibility awareness in non-technical roles. Once you have accessible template and business process for developing and updating congressional websites and applications, it is important to ensure that staff writers are aware of writing approaches that will result in more understandable and accessible information for these sites. WAI’s resources in this area include, for instance, tips for non-technical content writers.
- Procurement practices: As you know, Section 508 of the Workforce Investment Act takes a different approach to accessibility of information technology than does the Americans with Disabilities Act, and it is an approach that is particularly helpful for ensuring that vendors understand and can deliver ICT products and services that help ensure digital accessibility. Both the General Services Administration and the US Access Board have resources that are relevant to the procurement process for accessible technologies.

Finally, I want to draw your attention back to the circumstances that are causing us to have a virtual, rather than in-person, hearing today. The impact of the pandemic over the past year has been horrific, and it has hit many communities especially hard, including racial and cultural

communities. It has likewise hit the community of people with disabilities in a devastating and lethal way, even in so far as troubling quality-of-life assumptions or questions during initial resource-scarce circumstances. It is therefore more important than ever that people with disabilities have equal opportunity to comment into the public processes that impact our lives.

This is where the digital accessibility as an innovation driver holds such promise. We all, as a country, had to pivot to virtual modes with little notice or preparation; yet people with disabilities had to pivot in especially difficult ways. Over time, we are seeing progress through rapid innovation driven by necessity. This has included improved support for streaming captions and interpreters in virtual meetings, in online education, telehealth sessions, complex professional conferences, and more. Interoperability problems between assistive technologies such as screen readers and virtual environments are getting addressed; as are important simplifications of virtual meeting navigation and controls, though there is much left to do in all these areas. But these innovations have a carry-over benefits to all users of virtual environments.

Thinking beyond our current virtual mode, people with disabilities are now, understandably, not wanting to lose the virtual access that we have gained during this difficult time period. From many parts of the disability community, I am hearing a chorus of people saying that they want to maintain the virtual access that has opened new doors, through accessible hybrid meeting options – combined virtual and in-person events – in the future.

WAI is developing best practices to address accessibility of virtual, as well as hybrid, events. Though this work is still in the early stages, I expect that it may be relevant for future guidelines.

Given its obligation to provide an accessible public forum, I encourage Congress to engage in and if possible to contribute to this emerging important area of accessibility.

It is heartening to learn of interest in digital accessibility by the bipartisan Select Committee on Modernization. Thank you very much for your time. I look forward to any questions you may have.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Brewer.

And our final witness is John Uelmen. Mr. Uelmen serves as general counsel of the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights, where he previously held the positions of acting general counsel, deputy general counsel, and supervising attorney.

In December 2015, the Board of Directors appointed him as the general counsel, along with a team of attorneys and inspectors who conduct comprehensive inspections of Capitol Hill buildings and grounds.

Mr. Uelmen ensures legislative branch compliance with health and safety and public access laws incorporated in the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995. Mr. Uelmen is also responsible for investigating and enforcing violations of the labor laws in the CAA.

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

STATEMENT OF JOHN UELMEN

Mr. UELMEN. Good morning, Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and other members of the Select Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to appear today about ADA access issues in the House.

I have been asked to briefly summarize the findings from the report we jointly prepared with the Architect of the Capitol and the House Sergeant at Arms pursuant to the House resolution passed in the last Congress at the behest of this committee.

I think, to better understand this report, let me kind of briefly describe the barrier identification and removal process that is currently in place.

The current system has been in place for about 11 years. Pursuant to the CAA, my office inspects all legislative branch facilities on the Hill for ADA access issues and reports those findings to stakeholders.

Under this system, we systematically inspect the facilities and provide the periodic reports. We also conduct special inspections at the request of Members, employees, employing offices, and visitors. And we also then investigate specific charges of discrimination, alleged denial of access to a program, service, activity, or a public accommodation because of a disability.

During the past 11 years, we have inspected almost all the public facilities on the campus, which has, as you probably know, 18 million square feet of building space and 460 acres of surrounding grounds.

We have meticulously identified and recorded in our database each barrier to access, reported those findings to the Architect of the Capitol and other employing offices, and summarized these findings in periodic reports to Congress.

Under this barrier identification and removal approach, we evaluate the facilities using the 2010 Standards for Accessible Design, which are based on guidelines developed by the Access Board and are the most recent standards.

These standards, for the most part, apply to new construction and alterations. So there are some challenges when you apply them to existing buildings.

We use the standards really for planning purposes so that as a facility is altered or refurbished, it is gradually brought up to the standards to the extent feasible.

And, of course, here we have some very old historic buildings that are essentially living museums that must also function as office space and also maintain a high level of security.

So that what we find is that in our buildings that we have to consider both the historic preservation interests, as well as the potential security interests when we are looking at improving accessibility.

But under this system, we have identified most, if not all, of the physical access barriers existing on the Hill and provided those findings to the Architect of the Capitol and other employing offices, together with a possible solution for each of these barriers.

Moving to the report that we issued last Congress, first of all, I think there is some good news in that report. The inspectors were, I think, impressed with the renovations taking place in the Cannon Building. I think that once those renovations are complete we will see a great improvement in accessibility in this building.

Also, I think the report did note that there have been many barriers removed in Congress. I think most notably have been the improvement in the Independence Avenue entrance to Rayburn. I think the new lift there is a bigger improvement over what we had before.

We have also seen an improvement kind of in the balcony area of Rayburn, which is often used for public gatherings, at least the lift there is greatly improved.

The not-so-good news is, of course, we found over 1,600 barriers to access in House facilities. A good chunk of those barriers were in Member offices, 466, and many of those can be solved fairly easily by removing or replacing furniture, putting in self-service racks at accessible levels, keeping both sides of double leaf doors open.

Another kind of large chunk of the barriers are 532 were in multi-user restrooms. Again, some of these can be solved or have been solved fairly quickly by moving fixtures and dispensers, adding door pulls. Other solutions are more complicated and require reconfiguring the design of the stalls or the fixture itself.

We also saw some facility-wide barriers, such as door hardware that cannot be grasped easily with one hand.

And in the report we also attempted to give you a functional accessibility assessment. This type of assessment can help to identify potential access issues that are not found by referencing the standards.

For example, while the 2010 standards will allow us to assess whether a restroom identified as accessible has any barriers, the standards will not tell us whether the number of accessible restrooms or their distribution is convenient or adequate.

So some of the functional accessibility findings are, I think, not surprising based on the testimony you have heard so far. I think the current distribution and number of accessible restrooms and family restrooms is not convenient for many users. The current directional signage and directories are often confusing, difficult to read, or inadequate.

Access to the buildings is affected by the topography of the Hill, obviously, including where the drop-off locations are for taxis and cars, and the Capitol South Metro stop elevator leaving people at the bottom of the hill.

And also, finally, movement between the buildings, the House buildings, can be difficult for those with disability impairments or mobility impairments because often the most accessible route is outside and not well marked. And I think you heard some of the testimony about the challenges of moving through the tunnels.

Finally, looking at the future in the report, the Architect of the Capitol has provided a description of how it is addressing the facility access issues that were identified. Generally, barriers with the most—what we call an A severity code, which are those that affect safety concerns, are prioritized and they are removed fairly quickly.

The same can be said for barriers that could be easily corrected. The B and C barriers can take more time, particularly if they involve extensive designing, planning, and funding.

The AOC does consider and integrate open ADA barrier findings in its current and future projects, and the AOC is also undertaking additional studies and reports which are considering accessibility issues, including the ongoing transportation and security studies.

The one suggestion that I have for the committee, because I know this committee likes to hear suggestions, and that would be to create an ADA coordinator position in the House. This is a position that is familiar with many members of the disability community since it is a position that is required by the regulations for State and local governments and executive branch agencies.

I think someone in this position could assist in implementing the three recommendations that the committee set forth in the last Congress by dealing with websites and apps, House proceedings, and Capitol grounds and facilities.

I think this person could help serve as a clearinghouse for information and coordinate all of the House-related ADA access efforts, which are really made by a variety of offices, which includes the AOC, CAO, OHEC, CHA, SAA, USCP, OCWR, and OCAS, the Office of Congressional Accessibility Services.

And finally, I think that this office would complement and be consistent with the recent creation of other House offices, such as the Office of Employee Advocacy and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

So, again, I thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The statement of Mr. Uelmen follows:]

**Written Testimony of John D. Uelmen, General Counsel, Office of Congressional Workplace Rights
Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
Re: Making the House More Accessible to the Disability Community
May 27, 2021**

Good Morning Chair Kilmer, Vice-Chair Timmons and other members of the Select Committee. My name is John D. Uelmen and I am the General Counsel for the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access issues. One of my statutory responsibilities under Section 210 of the Congressional Accountability Act is to investigate ADA access issues in Congressional facilities. I have been working on ADA access issues on the Hill since 2009 when I started working for OCWR and improving accessibility has been a priority for me since being appointed as General Counsel by the OCWR Board of Directors in 2015.

I have been asked to speak to you about the report we jointly prepared with the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) and the House Sergeant at Arms pursuant to House Resolution 756 which was passed during the 116th Congress at the urging of this Committee. By way of background, under Section 210 of the Congressional Accountability Act (CAA), my office investigates accessibility issues in several different ways. First, we periodically and systematically inspect all facilities for ADA access issues. Since I joined the office, we have inspected the public spaces in the approximately 18 million square feet of building space we have here and the surrounding grounds which comprises approximately 460 acres. Second, we conduct special inspections regarding particular facility issues when requested to do so by a member of the public, an employee, or an employing office. Finally, we investigate charges of discrimination from persons who allege that they were denied access to a service, program, activity, or public accommodation because of a disability.

In the joint report we issued last year, we tried to provide you with the most recent information we have about barriers to access in the House. In general, our usual inspection approach involves identifying barriers to access and providing recommended solutions regarding removal of those barriers. We developed this approach with the assistance of our contractor, Evan Terry Associates (ETA), which is a leading national architectural firm involved in identifying and removing barriers to access. ETA has allowed us to use the database software it developed to assist in our inspections and record the results. Under this approach, the facilities are evaluated using the 2010 Standards for Accessible Design (the most recent version of the Standards), which are based on guidelines developed by the Access Board. These standards do not require that all existing buildings meet the current requirements. Instead, the idea behind the ADA and the Standards is that, as existing buildings are altered and refurbished, the buildings will be gradually transformed into compliance with the standards to the extent that this is feasible. In general, there should be a transition plan in place to eventually bring facilities into compliance.

What this means is that all barriers to access are not necessarily violations of the ADA. The reason we inspect for compliance with the 2010 Accessibility Standards is for planning purposes. We make the stakeholders aware of areas where there are deviations from the standards so that these access issues will be considered in future alteration and refurbishment plans.

In the database, we meticulously record the details regarding each barrier we have identified. These details include relevant measurements, photos accurately depicting the barrier, location information, an assessment of the severity of the barrier, and possible solutions that can be used to remove the barrier. The information in the database is regularly provided to the AOC and other employing offices. To assist in prioritizing barrier removal projects, we assess the severity of the barrier using the following codes:

- A: Safety Consideration
Potential safety consideration for people with disabilities.
- B: Blocks Access
Blocks access to a significant number of people with disabilities.
- C: Major Inconvenience
Major inconvenience to a significant number of people with disabilities.

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- G: Safe Harbor
“Safe Harbored” barrier because, while it does not meet the requirements of the 2010 ADA Standards, it does meet the requirements of the 1991 Standards.

In general, the severity of the barrier is determined by how much a deviation there is from the standard and whether the purpose of the element is safety related.

While the report itself is quite detailed regarding the barriers we found, the highlights can be summarized as follows:

- We found 1,632 barriers to access in House buildings
- 477 of these barriers are in Member offices and can be solved fairly easily by moving around furniture, placing literature and self-service items on racks within the required reach ranges, replacing conference tables that are too low, keeping both sides of a double leaf door open, etc.
- 532 of these barriers are in multi-user restrooms. Some of these can be solved by moving fixtures and dispensers to the correct height or adding door pulls. Others are more complicated and difficult, involving reconfiguring the design of the stalls or the layout of the fixtures within the room
- There are whole facility barriers that exist throughout all of the buildings such as door hardware that cannot be grasped easily with one hand or requires tight grasping.

In addition to providing you with information regarding barriers to access based on noncompliance with the 2010 Standards for Accessible Design, we provided you with an assessment of functional accessibility issues. These cover access issues that are not necessarily addressed by the 2010 Standards. For example, while the standards allow us to assess whether a multi-user restroom designated as accessible is in compliance, they do cover how many accessible restrooms should be in the facility or how they are distributed. Some of the functional accessibility issues that were identified included:

- The current distribution and number of accessible restrooms and family restrooms is not convenient for many users
- The current directional signage and directories are often confusing, difficult to read, or inadequate
- Access to the buildings is affected by the topography of the Hill, the drop off locations for taxis and cars, and the metro stop elevator leaving people at the bottom of the hill
- Moving between House buildings can be difficult for those with mobility impairments because the most accessible routes are usually outside and not well marked

In the Report, the AOC has provided a description of how its office is addressing the facility access issues that we identified. The AOC is committed to remediating all identified barriers to access. Barriers identified with an “A” severity code are prioritized and generally removed fairly quickly as are the barriers that are easily corrected. Removing the “B” and “C” barriers can often take more time, particularly if they involve extensive designing, planning, and funding. The AOC considers open ADA barriers in all of its current and future projects along with the accessibility requirements of the ADA, building codes and functional accessibility improvements. The AOC is also undertaking additional studies and reports, in an effort to maximum accessibility to the Capitol campus. This includes the current ongoing transportation study and security study.

Regarding any specific recommendations that I might have, I have reviewed this Committee’s final report from the 116th Congress which made three recommendations related to improving access to House

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websites and apps, House proceedings, and Capitol Hill grounds and facilities. One change you could consider that would address all of these concerns would be to create and staff an ADA Coordinator position for the House. Under the regulations implementing the Rehabilitation Act and Title II of the ADA, state and local governments and federal agencies are required to have someone serve in the position of ADA Coordinator. Generally, the ADA Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the efforts of the government entity to comply with the ADA. In the House, this could be a designated person who can be reached at a well-published phone number and email address who would assist: (1) persons with disabilities who have website, proceedings or facility access issues; (2) employing offices and employees who are looking for assistance with reasonable accommodation issues; (3) employing offices looking for assistance in improving access to websites, apps, and proceedings; and (4) committee staff and Members who are looking for other access information or the status of barrier removal efforts. Ideally, the ADA Coordinator serves as sort of "clearing house" for information and knows who to contact to help solve ADA access issues. For the House, there is a long list of offices who have staff involved in solving ADA access issues, including the CAO, AOC, OHEC, CHA, SAA, USCP, OCWR, and the Office of Congressional Accessibility Services (OCAS). In addition, there are often designated individuals in Member offices and on committee staffs that handle these issues. Exactly who does what is confusing to members of the public as well as to Members and staff. People in the disability community are generally familiar with the concept of an ADA coordinator and often the phone number for this person is listed on the outside of buildings and displayed prominently on websites and social media postings.

While the OCAS does provide some of these services, I believe that the House would greatly benefit from having its own designated ADA coordinator who would have a physical presence in the House and a virtual presence on Housenet, web pages, and social media. This would also complement and be consistent with the recent creation of other House offices such as the Office of Employee Advocacy and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address this Committee. I am happy to address any specific questions that you may have.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, Mr. Uelmen.

And with that, we will dive into member questions. I will start by recognizing myself for 5 minutes. And we will have myself and then Mr. Timmons. And then our order is Mr. Perlmutter, Mr. Davis, Mr. Phillips, Mr. Joyce, and then Ms. Van Duyne.

My first question is for Ms. Ansley.

I think it is helpful for us to just get a better feel for some of the concerns you raised. You described it as being difficult just to get the members of your organizations to Capitol Hill. Can you just describe what a typical visit entails and what is the process and what are some of the difficulties?

And I know part of the trickiness of even entering buildings in the House is just the security screenings and that type of thing. And if you can just describe that and perhaps how it relates to other secure facilities, like airports or other Federal offices, if there are things that we can learn or not learn from those entities.

Ms. ANSLEY. Well, thank you, Chair Kilmer, for that question.

There are a variety of barriers that certainly have to be considered, particularly for folks who may not be used to navigating Capitol Hill, so if we bring up members.

That can relate to the drop-off point. Typically, PVA is fortunate to have a van with a lift that we can drop people off, but often that is a game of Jenga trying to find a place where you feel like you can deploy the ramp. Our driver has to get out many times to help the person on the ramp. He needs some time, some space to do that.

So that begins. And then when you are looking at which is your closest office building, the most accessible entrance, that can depend on does the person use a manual chair or a power chair as to which entrance is most accessible for them and how far they want to go. Because as we mentioned several times, Capitol Hill is a hill and that itself is an accessibility barrier.

Then when you are getting into the Capitol, the security process can be varied. I have seen wheelchair users waved through without any screening at all. I have seen all the way to an invasive pat-down that occurs right there in front of everyone in the security line.

If you want to compare it to like a TSA screening, that kind of depends on, do you have PreCheck, do you have regular TSA? If you are just going through standard TSA, you are going to get a pretty invasive pat-down in that process.

But you also have the option to, if you can afford to upgrade to PreCheck, then it is a different process. They are just going to swab your chair, your hands, or your feet, and run it through a machine. So it can depend.

I think the biggest issue with security is that it is variable and it is not easy for wheelchair users to understand, which am I going to get? Am I going to get waved through or am I going to get a pat-down in front of all my colleagues and everybody else who happens to be watching?

From there, it is trying to find where is the correct elevator, particularly if we have to go between House office buildings.

If you are trying to go from Longworth to Rayburn and you are going in the main entrance of Longworth, there is one elevator that

takes you down to the basement to get to Rayburn. And you have to keep calling the elevators until that particular one appears and it has got enough space in it that a wheelchair user can get in it.

And then, finally, when you get to the office, I have had to open the door and physically move chairs, coffee tables, all kinds of things just to literally get somebody in the door.

One of our women veterans who uses a large power chair reported that when she has come to Capitol Hill, many times she ends up having her meetings in the hallway.

Now, all of us have had hallway meetings if you have been on Capitol Hill, but when that is kind of your standard because literally you cannot get into the office to navigate it, that is troublesome, particularly for a woman who has served her country and has a disability as a result.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate that concern that you are raising.

Mr. Uelmen, you touched on the idea of an ADA coordinator. I just want to get a sense of how the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights coordinates with the other offices involved in solving ADA access issues and perhaps talk about how you might envision an ADA coordinator fitting into the current structure that supports offices seeking accommodations for staff and for visitors with disabilities.

Mr. UELMEN. Sure. We work with other offices in a variety of different ways. I mean, for our systematic inspections, we conduct an opening conference and we will invite all of the stakeholders that might be interested.

So that might include representatives from the Architect of the Capitol, from USCP, from it might be the CAO in the House, it might be OHEC, the Office of House Employment Counsel.

And many times all of them are involved in our inspections because, depending on the issue, it is going to be one of theirs to help solve it.

So, I mean, often we, because we work with all of the different offices, we are often right now the one that tries to communicate and kind of smooth out who is supposed to do what when it comes to inspections.

The same is true of our special inspections and our charges. I mean, generally we will, again, have an opening conference, bring in all the interested parties that may be able to solve the issue. I mean, our focus is really future looking always. Our approach to enforcement is not going to punish them; it is more how do we solve this issue.

And often around here it is figuring out who can do what to solve it, because it is, I think, confusing in terms of who has what responsibility.

And I think that is where the ADA coordinator could help you a lot, I mean, especially in focusing on all the House issues. You pointed out in your report, I mean, you do have separate issues with websites and with apps.

And just having one point of contact as somebody who—if somebody is having difficulty, for instance, getting out of the building because they stayed late talking to a Member and the entrance they came in was closed, I mean, they could contact the ADA coor-

dinator and that person could help them get out, get out [audio malfunction].

The CHAIRMAN. Oops. I think we have temporarily lost Mr. Uelmen, but hopefully he will come back. I am also out of time.

So let me invite Vice Chair Timmons to ask some questions.

You are recognized.

Mr. TIMMONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just can't help but think about the fact that, one, Rayburn is one of the most confusing buildings ever constructed by man, and the fact that if you are only able to get in and out of one or a couple of points, how difficult it will be.

I get frustrated just walking around Rayburn because I always get lost. But the thought that there is only one or two ways to get in and out of Rayburn or any of these buildings would be just incredibly frustrating.

So I think it is great that we are having these conversations because we need—we must do better. And I appreciate everybody's work on that.

Mr. Uelmen, welcome back. We need to work on internet, too, obviously. I want to thank you for your work on these issues and your testimony today.

I also want to take a moment to echo the comments of the chairman in recognizing the services that the Office of Congressional Accessibility Services provides to offices that have questions about how to accommodate staff or visitors on accessibility, as well as those wishing to visit the Capitol.

They are an important and yet probably underutilized resource, and they are doing good work. And I just want to take a moment to thank them.

But also really we need to bring focus to other offices on this, to make sure that everyone knows that the services are available.

And along those lines, Mr. Uelmen, can you talk about—we were just talking about the ADA coordinator. How do you envision that really working, and could you share your thoughts kind of further on that?

Mr. UELMEN. Sure. First of all, I do think OCAS does a phenomenal job. I think David Hauck and his folks, particularly with the Capitol Building and CVC, I mean, they really, with the resources they have, I think that they do a good job. And I don't mean to diminish that in any way by suggesting that an ADA coordinator would be useful for the House.

But I think the House has some specific challenges the Senate does not have. I mean, the Members are here, they have very short terms, a 2-year term. I think they have challenges setting up their offices. Just figuring out who does what when you are setting up an office, I think, is a big challenge that Members have, and you have a big turnover in staff.

And just having somebody looking out for the House's interests specifically and coordinating, just providing a clearinghouse for information in terms of how you can get assistance to do [inaudible] I think would be of great benefit, I mean.

So that is really where that recommendation comes from. I have spoken to the Architect about it. I think they agree that that would be a good person that they could also interact with, as well as

OCAS, as well as Office of House Employment Counsel, CAO, I think just having one.

The other thing is, if the House wants to set a higher standard than what the ADA requires, it could do that in using an ADA coordinator.

For instance, the ADA standard doesn't require door openers. The ABA standards do, but the ADA standards don't require door openers, although the Architect has put a lot of them in. But if the House decided that is going to be the standard, then the ADA coordinator could help implement that in the House.

Mr. TIMMONS. Sure. Thank you. Did you say there are 1,600 doors that are not currently accessible?

Mr. UELMEN. There are quite—I mean, if you look at—the standards require, for instance, if you have double leaf doors, that both of the leaves be wide open. So if you look at all the number of double leaf doors, they are virtually all—none of them are needed.

Now, there are actual security concerns with that, too, I think. I think the Capitol Police want Members to have heavy doors and Members want to be able to close the doors quickly in the event of some type of security event, which is why I think many times only the one leaf is open. So those are things that have to be worked out.

Mr. TIMMONS. Sure. And in the new—the Cannon renovation, the doors are—I imagine that they are fire rated. There are security issues and they are enormous and they are see-through. So, I mean, I cannot imagine that the glass doors that do have door openers on them—I mean, those are probably what, \$50,000 to \$100,000 each?

Mr. UELMEN. Yes. None of these—a lot of times the solutions are not inexpensive.

Mr. TIMMONS. Well, I think that the United States Government in our seat of power here in the Capitol probably should be leading by example and should not allow these problems to persist.

So I just want to thank all the witnesses for their testimony, and we are going to do whatever we can to help on all these issues.

So, Mr. Chairman, with that, I will yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks.

We have a slight change in our batting order. Mr. Perlmutter had to step out for a moment for Financial Services.

I am going to, just out of deference to his seniority, call on Mr. Davis and then Mr. Phillips.

Mr. DAVIS. Well, thank you, very, very much, Mr. Chair.

And thanks to the witnesses.

I want to start with Ms. Ansley.

In your testimony, you recommended we invest more in training Capitol Police and staff to both be more aware of individuals with disabilities and increase accommodation and assistance.

I agree and think we can make great strides with simply informing staff, especially our staff assistants on the Hill, about the resources available to them through both Mr. Uelman's OCWR team and the Office of Congressional Accessibility Services.

What do you think are the barriers blocking staff from being aware and taking advantage of the resources?

Ms. ANSLEY. Thank you for the question.

I think one of the barriers on the Hill is always time. It is very busy, there is lots going on. And I think incentivizing staff to get this training by having it be something that is coming from the top, whether it is the Members, it is leadership, that this type of training is important because it helps to improve accessibility, is key.

And I think providing staff with easy resources so that they know what to do when they get requests. Having checklists. Having an understanding of, if somebody tells me that a wheelchair user is coming to this meeting, what does that mean for my office? It means I might have to move something, I might have to have the door open and ready when it is close to time for them to arrive.

I think as easy as we can make it for staff to have those resources at their fingertips, the more likely it is that they will then be able to put that into place when they are balancing a hundred other things that they are trying to take care of at any one moment.

Mr. DAVIS. Great.

Do you, or any of the witnesses for that matter, you just mentioned some sample outreach strategies that have been successfully deployed, do you have any more that you would be willing to share with us?

Ms. BREWER. I would be happy to comment. This is Judy Brewer.

Mr. DAVIS. Go ahead.

Ms. BREWER. Yeah. And thank you for this question with regard to training in the digital accessibility area.

We feel that it is important to look at the many different roles in an organization. So, for instance, someone who is a website developer or a mobile application developer clearly needs some training as to how to apply that standard.

But at the same time you need to make sure that management has training so they have broad awareness of what the requirements are, how to achieve it, what potential barriers to uptake are, and so forth. It is helpful to have somebody at a high level who can be a champion who is also oriented to the issue.

It is also helpful to have nontechnical people who have awareness of how to address accessibility in the particular form of digital accessibility. And I imagine that that carries over as well to the built environment. There is a training need for the practical details, but also management need for training and so forth.

And there are many resources available for that in terms of digital accessibility. So we have free open courses. There are also more specialized courses that different businesses provide.

Mr. DAVIS. Excellent.

Well, as the ranking member of House Administration, I know both the majority and the minority on that committee would love to be able to continue to work with each and every one of you to do what we can to make sure the areas that we have oversight over continue to address some of the problems that have been brought up by all of the witnesses' testimony.

And, Mr. Uelmen, if I could—and I apologize if I am pronouncing your name wrong—but if I could end with some questions to you.

As the Architect of the Capitol performs its security assessment and undertakes its larger multiyear transportation study, is your office included in either of those conversations?

Mr. UELMEN. Yes. First of all, you are pronouncing my name perfectly.

Yeah, the Architect, we have been very involved in the transportation study. We have had our contractor involved as well in terms of providing suggestions regarding drop-off locations and some of the access issues into the buildings themselves.

We haven't been involved too much in the security study, but I expect that we will. Generally, we do get involved.

Mr. DAVIS. Good. Is there anything we can do at House Administration or with this committee to help foster even a better relationship with the Architect?

Mr. UELMEN. There is nothing I can think of offhand, but I would certainly be willing to think about that question some more and get back to you or your staff about that.

Mr. DAVIS. Well, I have been amazed. Since we run new Member orientation, I have seen the office lotto that usually takes all the energy out of Congress solving any other problems for at least a week. That one issue does not—I hear no complaints where we are able to make an accommodation to some of our newly elected Members with disabilities. And that is a testament, because people—all of us want to help and all of us want to help you help everyone else too.

So with that, thank you, Mr. Chair, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, Mr. Davis.

Next up, Mr. Phillips.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I just want to thank all of you. Some wonderful propositions, most of them affirming.

My real, more than a question, it is more of a statement, Mr. Uelmen, you spoke about 477 barriers. My colleague, Mr. Davis, just asked how House Admin can be a better liaison perhaps.

And I just want to make that proposition that with so much low-hanging fruit how we could easily distribute these best practices to new Members and existing Members at the beginning of a Congress or, frankly, at any time. That is easy. It doesn't take a lot of action. And just want to advocate for so doing.

But just want to thank our witnesses and your testimony. You have elevated some important issues that we have to address, and we intend to do so. So gratitude and many thanks.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Phillips.

Mr. Joyce.

The CHAIRMAN. Sorry, Mr. Joyce. I see you. I can't hear you.

Mr. JOYCE. I have been listening, but I have no questions at this time, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. All right.

Mr. JOYCE. I am doing this off my phone. I apologize.

The CHAIRMAN. That is all right. That is all right.

Then we have got Ms. Williams.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Good morning, everybody. And I first want to apologize for my tardiness. Right at the start of this hearing I got a call that a constituent and a county commissioner in my district passed way who I just spent the entire day with Saturday. So I had to get myself together. But I am here now.

For the committee, I apologize if my questions are redundant. This was a topic that I really wanted to hear more about and dig into.

And so, Mr. Uelmen, I think I am pronouncing your name correctly? Perfect.

I know that my constituents, coming from Georgia, we are hundreds of miles away, and it is already enough of a travel to get here for that distance. But we have so many other barriers that in your testimony you reference of even when you get to the Capitol that people still have to deal with just getting around the Capitol complex.

And you mentioned 1,632 accessibility barriers in House buildings alone, and one of them includes the multiple barriers in Member offices, and some of those can be easily resolved.

How do you recommend that our offices proactively prevent or identify and eliminate the barriers within our own spaces, our individual offices?

Mr. UELMEN. Well, we actually do have some guidelines on our website. We have got a video kind of directed at Member offices specifically. We have got some checklists. We have worked with both employment counsel on both the House side and the Senate side to come up with checklists to be used in district offices as well just to think about ADA access.

So we do our best to publicize that those resources are available. We don't have access to the internal network at the House, though we do have it on our website, so that is a great place to start.

Also, our office is always available for any consultation. We have consulted with Members before who are looking at specific issues in their House or even in district offices, and we have worked through how they could solve those.

So we do have that resource available to you.

Ms. WILLIAMS. And, Mr. Uelmen, I am wondering if any of this has come up as a resource issue, like in making modifications in offices, if that has been a challenge.

And, if so, like, what do you think needs to be done so that we can tackle that, advocate for the resources to get some of these issues fixed, and then to also advocate for fixing the more complex issues around the Capitol as well?

Mr. UELMEN. Yeah. Well, the big challenge in Member offices is how tight the space is. We work on the areas that the public comes in so that at least there is access to a conference room with a table that is at accessible height. We encourage them not to have to move around furniture, that it is always in that position so it is inviting to people who come in. There is no easy solution to getting Members more space.

But the one thing, I think, that we are learning from the pandemic is that Zoom is a good resource and that more and more staff work can be done probably remotely. I think the Hill has been somewhat slow in doing that. That potentially could at least free up some space in the office where you don't have to have staff in every day or something or alternate when staff comes in.

So that may be not the ideal solution, but certainly a less expensive solution to that.

I think the resource issues, I mean, obviously the AOC prioritizes—there are ongoing maintenance issues in all of the facilities, as well as safety issues, as well as ADA access issues.

Again, I think the AOC does a good job providing to Appropriations their list of projects and what is going to be funded and not and leaves it up to Appropriations to decide what is going to be funded or not funded.

So it is really a matter of getting the ADA access programs higher priority and get them funded.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you.

And, I mean, just my opinion, I don't think ADA access should be up for if we fund it or not. Like, that should be a must-have on the priority list.

And, finally, I have a few seconds left, you also advocate for the creation of a House-designated ADA coordinator to facilitate the accessibility of Congress both physically and virtually.

Do you envision any role for the coordinator in proactively reaching out to congressional offices to share accessibility best practices?

I know you mentioned it was on the website, but I haven't seen this. And so that is something that I need to be more proactive about.

But how can we be more proactive with Members of Congress to make sure that we have that information?

Mr. UELMEN. Yeah. Certainly, that really is one of the primary roles of an ADA coordinator, is to work with offices. There is mention of training. That is something that training can be provided. All of those things.

And by having it located in the House and having access to the House Net, which is, I think, where most Members get their information, if there is a big presence there with those resources, I think more Members are going to be aware of what resources are available.

And, of course, that person can also direct you to the other resources that are available, either to the Office of Congressional Accessibility Services or to our office or to the Office of House Employment Counsel.

So that is why I think the coordinator might be beneficial too.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you so much.

And, Mr. Chairman, my apologies, I did go over just a few seconds.

The CHAIRMAN. No apology necessary, and we are glad you are here. And I am sorry to hear about your loss.

I want to give members an opportunity if they have additional questions. I have a round two question and it is for Ms. Ball.

I was hoping you could just explain the on-boarding process in your office. What accommodations were made? Was there a point person in your office? Who was it that they worked through in some of the other departments, like CAO and HR and Payroll and Benefits?

Ms. BALL. Sure. Thank you very much for that question. Obviously, some of that was sort of behind the scenes as I was being on-boarded, so I will try and answer the question as best I can.

Liz Hollis in our office was really the point person, and she reached out to me very early on. Obviously, they had seen in the

interview that I was a wheelchair user and so they were aware of that and wanted to make sure that everything was accessible to me. And Liz literally asked me for the dimensions of my wheelchair and different things like that so that they could go through my—figure out which office was going to work best for me, which furniture I might need.

And also, one other thing I really appreciated was they made sure the common spaces that the staff work in were going to be accessible to me, so that I wouldn't be sort of relegated to staying in my office. And I haven't had any particular issues navigating those spaces.

In terms of paying for things, I didn't really need any particular accommodation. Actually, they did have a desk that was made. Unfortunately, it ended up not working for me because I usually get out of my wheelchair and sit in a regular chair when I am at work. But they did go through the Architect of the Capitol, is my understanding, to acquire that, and their efforts were very much appreciated.

And I certainly felt like that was something that there was a real information exchange, which I think is the important thing, is that universal access is great, but a lot of times a person with a disability might need specific accommodations.

And so having a conversation with that person and asking what is going to meet their needs is really the most important part of the process, and they absolutely did that.

The CHAIRMAN. You may have just spoken to this, but did your employing office have to—did they spend the money to get equipment and furniture, or was it provided by the House?

Ms. BALL. Again, I didn't really need a whole lot of extras just because of the nature of my disability. I am able to use most regular things. I can stand up some, so that means that I don't have some of the same accessibility needs as other folks do.

In terms of the desk that they did have made, I believe that that just came out of the committee's budget.

And one thing I would like to point out about that, I mean, I am absolutely for allocating more resources to making things accessible. But under the ADA employers are responsible for making the environments that their staff are in accessible regardless, and there is no particular funding available for that other than tax incentives and things like that.

So it is just part of doing business. And I think that that is something that—that is an attitude that needs to be really prevalent in the House as well. And, again, it was certainly the case on the committee I worked for.

I think Mr. Uelmen makes a very good point that there is so much turnover just in terms of Members being here for a relatively short period of time sometimes, they may not have that kind of awareness of all of their responsibilities as employers.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Let me invite, do any other members of the committee have a round two question?

I think I see only nodding heads or shaking heads. Okay.

Well, with that, I want to thank all of our witnesses for their testimony today. I really appreciated your perspectives and think you gave our committee a lot to chew on. So thank you for that.

As I am issuing gratitude, I also want to just thank our staff for putting this hearing together. The Select Committee has a terrific team that is doing great work pulling together, I think, some really insightful hearings, so thank you for that too.

So with that, 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. 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.
[Whereupon, at 12:18 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX I

Thank you Congresswoman Williams for your questions and your continuing interest in resolving ADA access issues in the House. Here are my answers to the three questions you posed for the record.

1. How do you recommend that our offices proactively prevent - or proactively identify and eliminate - the barriers within our own spaces?

On the OCWR website we have a video, a checklist, and general tips that your offices can use to proactively identify and eliminate access barriers within your own spaces. The ADA inspection video tutorial can be found here: <https://www.ocwr.gov/videos/ada-inspection-tutorial>. The ADA checklist can be found here: <https://www.ocwr.gov/sites/default/files/ADA%20Checklist%202016.pdf>. Our tips for improving office accessibility can be found here: <https://www.ocwr.gov/sites/default/files/adarevised.pdf>. Making staff aware of such resources when hired and providing periodic reminders can help ensure that they know how to identify and remove barriers.

The Chief Administrative Officer can assist you with replacing furniture such as conference tables that do not meet the ADA standards. The House Superintendent can help you with structural issues, such as doorways that are too narrow. The Office of House Employment Counsel is also available to help with accessibility issues. Both our office and the Office of House Employment Counsel are also available for consultation to address any specific concerns or questions that you may have. We can be reached at adaaccess@ocwr.gov.

Finally, reminding staff that accessibility is a civil right with a high priority and not merely an exercise in checking boxes for technical compliance will help ensure that offices are accessible and welcoming to visitors with disabilities.

2. And as members, what resources can we advocate for to ensure we can promptly tackle the more complex fixes throughout the Capitol as well?

As you know, there are many steps involved in the planning and appropriation process for projects addressing issues with Capitol Hill facilities. Prioritizing among the various maintenance, security, and accessibility needs is not easy; however, those involved in this process are responsive to the concerns expressed by Members. By making those involved in planning and appropriating funds aware of your continued interest and concern in removing accessibility barriers, Members can help ensure that those projects targeted at removing those barriers are developed and funded.

3. Do you envision any role for the Coordinator in proactively reaching out to congressional offices to share accessibility best practices?

Yes, most definitely. Certainly, one of the primary functions of an ADA Coordinator would be to reach out to Congressional offices to share best practices, provide training, and to make them aware of the latest available assistive technology. By having a virtual presence on HouseNet and a physical presence in the House, an ADA Coordinator could make more Members aware of the accessibility resources available to them. Most ADA Coordinators belong to one or more of the professional organizations that provide training and share advice on best practices, innovative solutions to barrier removal, and technological innovations. An ADA Coordinator can help ensure that Members are aware of the best and most recent advice and practices in these areas.