

Report of the Outgoing Vice-Chairman of the Board

Congressman Larry Winn, Jr.

To the Congress:

During the majority of the 95th Congress, I have had the pleasure of serving as the Vice Chairman of the Technology Assessment Board. This has personally been a very worthwhile and fulfilling opportunity. I feel, though, that it is quite important that I express my views regarding the development and operation of the Office of Technology Assessment throughout the last Congress.

This has truly been an active 2 years—2 years that will undoubtedly hold some of the most significant milestones in the history of OTA. It has been a period that has offered both the bitter and the sweet. We have suffered through the perils of the resignation of two Board members and the first Director, Emilio Daddario. We also witnessed a new breath of freshness with the appointment of our new Director, Russell Peterson. We have participated in an extensive evaluation of OTA and its organic act conducted by the House Committee on Science and Technology.

Despite the periods of turmoil and change, though, I believe the overall effect has been one of strengthening and maturing within the organization. I don't feel that OTA's effectiveness has been deteriorated as an independent arm of Congress. On the contrary, OTA should be stronger because of this period.

In these times of economic austerity it is obvious to wonder what the future will hold for OTA. Will OTA suffer due to the more conservative fiscal trends? I believe the future for OTA is bright. I do not feel the economic constraints will seriously hamper the efforts of OTA. However, there are many barriers and stumbling blocks that must be confronted. In the following sections, I would like to mention some areas which are of particular significance to me and in my opinion

represent the most likely areas for future problems.

The Role of the Technology Assessment Board

The role of the Board as quoted from the organic act is to “. . . formulate and promulgate the policies of the office. ” This role should be critically analyzed relative to the past actions of the Board. There have been times that the Board has become embroiled in details and matters that appear to be far removed from promulgating policy. In fact, many of the actions border on being management. The Board is not the place to manage the Office. The task of formulating a program policy that meets the needs of Congress is a formidable challenge requiring the total attention of the Board. In addition, it is of paramount importance, when formulating this policy, for the Board members to avoid the natural tendency of promulgating policies that satisfy individual needs as opposed to the needs of Congress as a whole.

Because of the size of the task of establishing policy, it is also imperative that the Members participate actively in the process. The Board members are undoubtedly the most qualified group available to define the short- and long-term needs of Congress. However, those needs cannot be satisfied in an equitable sense if there is not full participation by the Board members. As a consequence, every effort should be made to schedule meetings to maximize the opportunity for full participation by the Board members. As a consequence, every effort should be made to schedule meetings to maximize the opportunity for full participation by the Board members. Along with the expert advice of the Technology Assessment Advisory Council, I am confident

that a policy can be formulated that will do justice to the needs of Congress as a whole.

The Role of the Advisory Council

In past years, the Advisory Council has not been utilized to its fullest extent. However, two very positive changes occurred during the 95th Congress which will hopefully alleviate this problem. First of all, the Board officially stated that the Council's primary role would be to advise the Board on what technology assessment projects will most adequately satisfy the Board policy.

Secondly, the Office has established a project priority list. This list will provide an excellent opportunity for the Office and the Council to reflect the technology assessment needs. This list will undoubtedly act as a very valuable input into the Board's decision process for establishing the OTA policy.

I cannot overemphasize the significance of the Council's input in this process. The Board does not represent a good ear for the new and expanding technologies and their impact on society. The Council is the Board's most valuable line of communication for that type of information. It is also important to recognize the importance of maintaining a fresh perspective on the Council. As the needs and problems of society change we must have a Council that is abreast of those changing needs.

The Role of the Director

While carrying out the policy, the Director should have the latitude to bring to bear his own

perspective on the OTA staff without the outside influence of the Board and Council. However, continuous consultation and communication with the Board members is imperative. The Director's position is rather unique because he is a member of the Board. In this position, he has a great opportunity to directly bring the technical aspects to the predominately non-technical Board. However, he does have a rather tenuous balancing job when he attempts to not only satisfy the short term, brush fire needs of the Congress but also maintain a far-reaching crystal ball outlook.

Growth of OTA

OTA has a very valuable role to play for Congress. In these times of rapidly advancing technology, its role is even more critical. However, if the breadth of OTA jurisdiction is extended too far, its usefulness will be challenged. It is imperative that this focused direction on technology assessment be maintained. In conjunction with this, the manpower and budget would not maintain any sustained real growth.

The future holds a multitude of challenges that must be met forthrightly. I look forward to working with my colleagues in meeting these challenges and encourage their enthusiastic support.

Larry Winn, Jr.
Vice Chairman
Technology Assessment Board