

Holt Technology Assessment Bill, 2005
Draft, June 27, 2005

A BILL

To provide for the establishment of a Center for Scientific and Technical Assessment.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. CENTER FOR SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT.

(a) Establishment.--There shall be established a Center for Scientific and Technical Assessment (in this section referred to as the 'Center') to provide timely advice to the Congress on scientific and technical aspects of public policy issues. The Center shall be administered by a Director who shall report to the Comptroller General.

(b) Technical Assessment Board.--

(1) Establishment And Purpose.--There shall be established a Technical Assessment Board whose purpose shall be to provide guidance to the Director and Comptroller General to ensure that the Center provides timely and useful responses to congressional requests.

(2) Membership.--The Technical Assessment Board established under paragraph (1) shall consist of--

(A) 6 members of the Senate, including--

(i) 4 members appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, 2 from the majority party and 2 from the minority party; and

(ii) the chairman and ranking minority members of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs;

(B) 6 members of the House of Representatives, including--

(i) 4 members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, 2 from the majority party and 2 from the minority party; and

(ii) the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Government Reform; and

(C) the Director of the Congressional Research Service, who shall be a nonvoting member.

Service as a member on the Technical Assessment Board shall not be construed under the rules of the House of Representatives or the Senate as service as a member of a House of Representatives or Senate Committee.

(3) Vacancies.--Vacancies in the membership of the Technical Assessment Board shall not affect the authority of the remaining members to act, and such vacancies shall be filled in the same manner as in the case of the original appointment.

(4) Chairman And Vice Chairman.--There shall be selected at the beginning of each Congress a chairman and a vice chairman, one of whom shall be a member of the Senate selected by the members of the Technical Assessment Board who are members of the Senate from among their number, and one of whom shall be a member of the House of Representatives selected by the members of the Technical Assessment Board who are members of the House of Representatives from among their number. The chairmanship and vice chairmanship shall alternate between the Senate and the House of Representatives with each year. The chairman during each odd-numbered year shall be a member of the House of Representatives. The vice chairman shall act in the place of the chairman in the absence of the chairman.

(5) Authority To Act.--The Technical Assessment Board established under this subsection may sit and act at such places and times as it chooses, including during the sessions, recesses, and adjourned periods of Congress.

(c) Director and Deputy Director.--

(1) Director.--The Director of the Center shall be appointed by the Comptroller General with the approval of the Technical Assessment Board and shall serve for a term of 6 years unless sooner removed by the Comptroller General after consultation with the Technical Assessment Board. The Director shall receive basic pay at the rate provided for level IV of the Executive Schedule under section 5315 of title 5, United States Code, and shall be deemed subject to section 733(c) of title 31, United States Code.

(2) Powers And Duties.--In addition to the powers and duties vested by this section, the Director shall exercise such powers and duties as may be delegated by the Comptroller General. The Director, with the permission of the Comptroller General, shall have the authority to hire, remove, or promote permanent staff and enter into contracts for consultants, expert analysis, and peer reviewers described in subsection (f). The Director shall prepare the annual budget request for the Center which shall, subject to approval by the Comptroller General, be included as a separate line item in the proposed annual budget of the Government Accountability Office. An annual report of the Director on the work of the Center shall be included in the report required under section 719(a) of title 31, United States Code.

(3) Deputy Director.--The Director may appoint, with the advance approval of the Comptroller General, a Deputy Director who shall perform such functions as the

Director may prescribe and who shall be Acting Director during the absence or incapacity of the Director or in the event of a vacancy in the office of Director. The Deputy Director shall receive basic pay at the rate provided for level V of the Executive Schedule under section 5316 of title 5, United States Code, and shall be deemed subject to section 733(c) of title 31, United States Code.

(4) Conflicts Of Interest.--Neither the Director nor the Deputy Director shall engage in any other business, vocation, or employment than that of serving as such Director or Deputy Director, as the case may be; nor shall the Director or Deputy Director, except with the advance approval of the Comptroller General, hold any office in, or act in any capacity for, any organization, agency, or institution with which the Center makes any contract or other arrangement under this section.

(d) Congressional Requests.--

(1) In general- Any member of Congress may make requests to the Comptroller General that the Center conduct a study and report to the requester, within a specified time period, on any matter relating to scientific and technical assessment.

(2) Formal calls for requests- The chairman of the Technical Assessment Board established under subsection (b) periodically shall also submit to all members of Congress formal calls for requests to the Comptroller General under this subsection.

(3) Acceptance of Requests.—The Comptroller General shall send all requests to the Technical Assessment Board for prioritization. The Technical Assessment Board shall recommend to the Director and the Comptroller General the priority of the studies that shall be performed by the Center, taking into consideration available resources, the extent of bicameral and bipartisan support for the study, and the

national significance of the issue. The Comptroller General, in consultation with the Director and the Technical Assessment Board, shall determine the final priority for carrying out the studies recommended by the Technical Assessment Board.

(e) Advisory Panels.--The Director may establish an advisory panel, with advance approval of the Comptroller General, as necessary to support each technical assessment report provided by the Center. Such panels shall not be subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.).

(f) Peer Review.--Each report requested under this subsection shall be subject to peer review before delivery to the committee or member of Congress requesting the report. Such peer review shall consist of rigorous vetting, checking, criticism, and recommendations for improvement by independent, qualified experts in the various aspects of the subject of the request under study. Independent experts shall assess each Center report by considering the scientific method, factual accuracy, results, and conclusions put forward by the authors. The peer reviewers' comments shall be given to the report authors to allow for change, improvement, and modification of the report before delivery to the Director. After final review and approval by the Director and the Comptroller General, the report shall be delivered to the committee or member of Congress requesting the report.

(g) Public Release- Except for classified reports, the Center, with the permission of the Comptroller General, shall promptly release a report requested under subsection (d) to the public, except that such release shall be delayed by not more than 2 weeks at the request of the Committee or member of Congress requesting the report.

(h) Authorization Of Appropriations.--There are authorized to be appropriated to the Comptroller General for carrying out this section \$10,000,000 for each of the fiscal years 2006 through 2008, to remain available until expended. This section shall not be in effect for any fiscal year unless Congress has enacted a specific line item appropriation to fund the activities set forth under this section of at least \$10,000,000 for the fiscal year or the pro rated equivalent thereof.