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DEPUTY CLERK

H-154 THE CAPITOL

Office of the Clerk
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–6601

July 8, 2020

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Chairperson
Committee on House Administration
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rodney Davis
Ranking Member
Committee on House Administration
1216 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairperson Lofgren and Ranking Member Davis,

As required by Section 504 of House Resolution 756, agreed to by the House on March 10, 2020, I am attaching this initial report about establishing and maintaining a database of votes taken in committees.

If you or others on the committee have questions about this report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Clerk of the House

Enclosure

Votes Taken in Committees

As required by Section 504 of House Resolution 756, agreed to by the U.S. House of Representatives on March 10, 2020, the Clerk of the House submits this initial report about establishing (and maintaining) a database of votes taken in committees.

Background

As the members of the Committee know, the House is responsible for preparing, managing, distributing, and preserving (archiving) our official documents. These four tasks are also the responsibility of the House committees.

House and committee rules require that recorded committee votes (but not necessarily all votes) be included in a number of publications and websites, including the following:

- **Online on Docs.House.Gov**
  Committees are required to make any votes on any measure or matter before the committee publicly available in electronic form within 48 hours after the vote (House Rule XI, clause 2(e)(1)(B)).[1] While House Rules require that only recorded votes be posted, standards for electronic posting adopted by the Committee on House Administration encourage committees to post *all* votes (recorded, voice, procedural) taken during a committee meeting (business, hearing, markup, or other).[2] Committees post votes in PDF format. Every House committee chooses to what degree they post votes beyond what is explicitly required by House rules. Anecdotally, committees are posting all recorded votes taken during markups. An instance of a vote not being posted would be a procedural vote taken during a hearing that has no effect on the hearing.

- **Committee Reports**
  Committees are required to include "the total number of votes cast for and against, and the names of members voting for and against" reporting a measure or amendments offered to a measure in committee reports filed with the House (House Rule XII, clause 3). Procedural and voice votes are not required to be part of the committee report. These reports are printed in PDF format by the Government Publishing Office (GPO) and made available on GPO's repository govinfo.gov and the Library of Congress's Congress.gov.[3] The vote section in the committee report follows no uniform typesetting standard across the House and often includes scanned PDFs (not typeset). This makes the votes difficult to search. Some committees have content management systems that maintain content contained in their committee reports. Some of these systems generate the reports.

- **Activity Reports**
  No later than January 2 of each odd-numbered year, committees are required (House Rule X and clause 1(d)(1) of Rule XI) to submit to the House a report of legislative and oversight activities.

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[1] Sample vote on docs.house.gov: https://docs.house.gov/Committee/Calendar/ByEvent.aspx?EventID=110781 and https://docs.house.gov/Committee/Calendar/ByEvent.aspx?EventID=110815

[2] Electronic Posting Standards (approved December 16, 2011): https://cha.house.gov/sites/democrats.cha.house.gov/files/documents/hearing_docs/2011_12_16_posting_standards.pdf

[3] Sample Committee reports: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-116hrpt129/pdf/CRPT-116hrpt129-pt1.pdf and https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-116hrpt437/pdf/CRPT-116hrpt437.pdf

Committees choose to which degree they include detailed information about votes taken in committee.[4] Often it is only vote totals and does not include individual Member votes.

- **Committee Legislative Calendars**
  Some committees continue to maintain and publish legislative calendars. The maintenance and content of the legislative calendar vary enormously between the committees. Committee vote information is often published as part of the legislative calendar. Legislative data from the Clerk's Legislative Information Management System (LIMS) is transferred to the Committee Legislative Calendar application, currently maintained by the CAO's office. This application helps committees maintain the content contained in the Calendar as well as publish the Calendar.

Collecting Committee Votes as Data

While the committee vote data are being published in at least four publications and on most committee websites, there is no central location to view and analyze all votes taken in a committee or across all committees. Nor are published guidelines on how to maintain consistent vote records provided to the committees. Such a tool could be worthwhile and helpful, not only for the Members and staff, but also for the public. There is a key opportunity for the House to assist the committees in the maintenance of consistent vote records.

At this time, Office of the Clerk staff are analyzing the potential scope of this project based on current knowledge of the operations of the committees. Due to the current health emergency and implementation of priorities related to working remotely, our office has not yet met with the committees to gather information for project planning. We do know that the committees have numerous systems and applications that they are required to use. Careful consideration needs to be made regarding the scope of this project and what system designs and implementation strategies could work in each committee's current (or near future) workflow and processes without causing damaging disruption. Project planning and the building and use of this tool cannot be done without input and buy-in from staff across committees.

We want to build a solution that is based on human-centered design (HCD) principles and provides one central location to record, process, and share the vote data entered and verified by committee staff in other places, such as docs.house.gov and the publications mentioned above. Additionally, we are considering whether this work needs to be a separate project or if it could possibly be coupled with projects underway, such as the rewrite of LIMS or updates being planned for the House's Electronic Voting System (EVS). We will continue to update the committee about our discussions and recommendations.

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[4] Sample Activity report: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-114hrpt907/pdf/CRPT-114hrpt907.pdf