

February 15, 1995

Speaker Newton Gingrich
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

3RD DRAFT

Dear Speaker Gingrich,

We recognize that Congress is reviewing the role of OTA, the Office of Technology Assessment. The Carnegie Commission on Science, Technology, and Government issued a report on the Congressional support agencies in 1991, and we are attaching a copy of that report in the event that it would be useful to you and the Committee that is reviewing OTA.

We will briefly review the process which produced the report to emphasize the involvement of many thoughtful individuals. We should also mention that one of the signers of this letter, Joshua Lederberg, and one of the members of the Commission, William J. Perry, have served as chairs of OTA's Technology Assessment Advisory Council, and therefore had special experience with the agency.

In 1988, the Carnegie Commission established a Committee on Science, Technology and Congress, chaired by Dr. John Brademas, and including former Senators Mathias, Chiles, and Evans, former President Carter, and Dr. Guy Stever, Science Adviser to President Ford. In order to make the Commission reports more effective, Dr. Brademas established an advisory committee of 44 Senators and Representatives who met with him regularly to review reports and advise on issues that the Commission might address. Congress members Boehlert, Morella, and Walker were active members of the group. [The full list of members is listed on pp.7-8 of the report.] The draft report on the support agencies was reviewed with this advisory committee, and modified as a result, before being brought to the Commission for approval. The Commission reviewed the document further, and with a few changes, endorsed its publication as a Commission report. We believe that this process insured a constructive bi-partisan report.

The Commission found that OTA performs a critical role in the development of science and technology policy, serving an essential analytic and advisory

function for Congress. It also serves as an important reservoir of institutional memory for Congress. Nonetheless, the Commission recommended changes in the way that the OTA produces and delivers its reports, to make them more effective and timely. The Commission also recommended that the resources made available to OTA be commensurate with the demand for OTA's products. At that time we foresaw an increase in the demand and called for modest staff increases to meet it. If OTA's budget will be reduced, we urge that there be ways to reduce the demand, so that the OTA can continue to provide essential high-quality advice to Congress. Even with a constrained budget, we continue to recommend the changes to make OTA's reports more effective, and do not believe that these changes should require significant funding increases.

In dealing with the issues facing the country, Congress will be faced with dealing with more and more complex technical issues. Congress will need the best available technical advice to enable to make the best decisions. We believe that OTA can perform this valuable function, providing essential support to Congress, and urge that the Congressional review take account of this and of the strong support that OTA has gathered from the technical and political communities, particularly in the last dozen years of its existence.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg

William T. Golden