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PRIME MINISTER

MEETING WITH SIR TREVOR SKEET, SIR GERARD VAUGHAN AND
SIR IAN LLOYD

Attached is a brief (Flag A) for your meeting with the above tomorrow. Their request to you for a meeting follows a visit which they paid to the United States to look at the role of the Office of Technology Assessment and the Congressional Research Services in providing back-up services for Senators and Congressmen. What they are seeking is set out in the Early Day Motion which is also attached at Flag B. What they want is a body within the precincts of Westminster to research and prepare reports and advise Parliamentarians on scientific matters independently of the executive.

I am not entirely sure why they are coming to see you since if it is a matter for the Government at all it is a matter for the Leader of the House. It is a pity that Sir Trevor, Sir Gerard and Sir Ian could not have approached Mr. Biffen rather than take up your time at such a busy period.

No doubt you will have a view as a Member of this proposal but points which occur to me are:

(i) the objective seems to be to turn Members of Parliament into something closer to Senators and Congressmen with even more extensive access to Research Assistants, clerks, computers, libraries etc. All of this might flatter the egos of Members of Parliament but will not necessarily produce better government;

(ii) it is yet another step (of which Select Committees are the most obvious) along the road to building up the consensus model of politics over the Party model. We have seen the effects of putting together on Select Committees groups of disaffected Government backbenchers and able Opposition backbenchers with their own sources of advice and ambitious clerks writing reports based on minority points of view. I note from the brief that the Office of Technology Assessment provides "objective analysis of major public policy issues". I suspect that in our political system such an office would end up by acquiring its own political imperatives and supply objective political advice tailored to its own view of the world;

(iii) one should not underestimate the amount of help already available to Members. They have a substantial allowance; there are the facilities of the Library at their disposal; as Members of Select Committees they can employ Research Assistants and finally they can ask Parliamentary Questions and get the Government to do the work for them. There is no serious evidence that this is insufficient;

(iv) what the three Members propose would be very expensive. The US model (for considerably fewer Senators and Congressmen than there are MPs) has over 600 staff. At a time when (see the note at Flag C) the cost of running Parliament is increasing at well above the rate of inflation (10% last year) how can it possibly be justified for Members to vote themselves a substantial increase in support staff on only one facet of their work? And where on earth would they be put? The House already has difficulty accommodating the swollen army of Research Assistants who now inhabit it.

Cost of Parliament up to £126m to £72 million.

As you will see from the above I am not impressed by this proposal which seems to me to reinforce the notion of the House of Commons as an independent source of wisdom and advice entirely independent of the need to support or oppose

the Government of the day. This is all very well, but in the context of the American political system where that is precisely the role of Congress, but it is not what Parliament is about.

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(TIM FLESHER)

16 July 1986



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Qa 0524

MISS HOLE
10 Downing Street

15 July 1986

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY AND SCIENTIFIC
COMMITTEE - THURSDAY 17 JULY 1986

As requested I attach background briefing on the role of the Office of Technology Assessment and the Congressional Research Services in providing advice on scientific and technological issues to Congress. I also attach a short note about the recent visit to Washington by Sir Trevor Skeet, Sir Gerard Vaughan and Mr Ian Lloyd which has prompted their request to call on the Prime Minister. I am sending the information rather earlier than we agreed so that you can consider whether the Prime Minister would wish to have any further advice prior to the meeting.

T BUCHANAN

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY AND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE - THURSDAY 17 JULY 1986.

Background to Members' Visit to Washington - 31 March - 3 April 1986

The Chairman of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, Sir Trevor Skeet, together with Sir Gerard Vaughan (Chairman, Science and Technology Group, Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, Mr Ian Lloyd (Chairman, Select Committee on Energy) and Dr John Blaby (Vice Chairman of the Science and Technology Group, Parliamentary and Scientific Committee), visited Washington to examine the role of the Congressional Research Service (CRS) and the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) in providing scientific and technological information to Congress. The Group said that their visit was prompted by a growing recognition in Parliament that science and technology was becoming an increasing component of legislation and that there was a need for MPs to understand it further.

Both OTA and CRS are funded by Congress and report only to Congress. For quick advice, comments and briefings, Congressmen look to the CRS, with OTA providing major assessments on the social, economic and political impact of technologies as required by Committee Chairmen. More detailed notes on the two bodies are attached. In all instances, the objectivity and bipartisan nature of the advice is considered paramount and advocacy of a particular position is avoided. A number of other countries with parliamentary systems - the FRG, Netherlands and Australia - are known to be examining ways in which the American model might be adopted to meet the needs of a parliamentary system.

The Embassy has reported that after the meetings the UK group left Washington envious of the scientific and technological advice that Congressmen receive. They were well aware of the differences between the two legislative systems but were convinced of the need for some hybrid organisation which could provide Members of Parliament with timely and concise information on scientific matters. They believed this should come from an objective and bipartisan body funded through some creative financing scheme to ensure that it was independent of Government.

THE OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT (OTA)

1. General

OTA founded in 1972 is a non partisan support agency that serves the United States Congress by providing objective analysis of major public policy issues related to scientific and technological change. It explores complex issues involving science and technology, helping Congress to resolve uncertainties and conflicting claims, identifying alternative policy options, and providing early warning of new developments that could have important implications for future Federal policies. OTA does not advocate policy or actions, but points out their pros and cons and sets out the facts.

2. OTA/Organisation

Congressional Technology Assessment (OTA's governing) Board

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(Six Senators

Six Representatives)

Director OTA non-voting member

Advisory Council (10 Public members includes

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Comptroller General of USA and

Director Congressional Research Service

of the Library of Congress)

9 Main Programme Areas

Energy and Materials

International Security and Commerce

Industry Technology and Employment

Food and Renewable Resources

Health

Biological Applications

Communications and Information Technologies

Oceans and Environment

Science, Education and Transportation

3. OTA/Operations

OTA's multidisciplinary staff (110 persons) plans, directs and drafts all assessments. It draws extensively on the resources of the private sector, including universities, research organisations, industry and public interest groups.

Requests for OTA assessments may be made by the Chairmen of any congressional committee acting for himself, or on behalf of a ranking minority member, or a majority of committee members; by the OTA Board; or by the OTA Director, in consultation with the Board.

The board decides whether or not OTA will undertake a requested assessment. The bulk of OTA's work centres on comprehensive assessments that may take one or two years to complete. OTA draws on past and current work to provide a variety of responses to meet immediate congressional needs, such as briefings, workshops, testimony and special reports.

e.g. Some Assessments in progress as of March 1986.

Technology Transfer to China.

Technology and the American Economic Transition

International Competition in the Service Industries

Reduction of Industrial Hazardous Wastes.

New developments in biotechnology

Federal Government Information Technology

4. Reports

Throughout each project OTA uses advisory panels of experts on a particular subject as a way of ensuring that reports are objective, fair and authoritative.

After a completed assessment has been approved by the Director copies of the formal report are sent to the Technology Assessment Board for review and for authorisation for release.

The Congressional Research Service (CRS)

1. GENERAL

The Congressional Research Service is the department within the Library of Congress which, under its statutory charter, works exclusively as a reference and research arm for Members, committees, and staff of the United States Congress.

The Service makes such research available without partisan bias, in many forms including studies, reports, compilations, digests and background briefings. Upon request, CRS assists committees in analysing legislative proposals and issues, and in assessing the possible effects of these proposals and their alternatives. The Service's senior specialists and subject analysts are also available for personal consultations in their respective fields of expertise.

The Service currently responds to over 450,000 inquiries a year, the answers being provided by 587 research and information specialists, supported by 273 clerical and administrative staff. CRS had a budget for FY 1986 of \$38,963,000. The Service's personnel are professionals nationally recruited college graduates, the majority with advanced degrees, and the diversity of expertise is notable, including attorneys, economists, engineers, information scientists, librarians, defense and foreign affairs analysts, political scientists, public administrators, physical and behavioral scientists, and social program specialists, among others.

2. CRS/Organisation

The Service covers a much wider field than science and technology and is divided into seven Research Divisions:

- American Law
- Economics
- Education and Public Welfare
- Environment and Natural Resources

Foreign Affairs and National Defense
Government
Science Policy Research

3. CRS/Operations

The Service responds to inquiries from all Members, all committees and subcommittees, and staff in the Washington as well as the District or State offices of the Members). An inquiry may be as simple as a question on the population of California or as complex as a study of the possible ways to provide medical care to the aged. Average inquiries are answered within one to three days, and most research studies are delivered within two to four weeks. In addition to written products and tailored oral briefings, CRS staff present information to Members and staff of Congress in seminars and workshops. The Service averages two or three such seminars every week when Congress is in session.

4. Reports

The research product may take the form of brief, 2-3 page typed memoranda or extensive reports of several hundred pages, many of them issued as congressional publications e.g. floor statements in the Congressional Record, committee reports and House and Senate documents. Much of the research is available on-line in the computers (issue briefing papers and legislative digests) used in congressional offices.

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1067 **ADVICE ON TECHNOLOGY FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS OF BOTH HOUSES**

Sir Trevor Skeet
Sir Gerard Vaughan
Sir Ian Lloyd
Dr Jeremy Bray
Mrs Renée Short
Mr Paddy Ashdown

Dr Norman A. Godman	Mr Laurie Pavitt	Mr Alex Eadie	★ 50
Mr David Knox	Sir David Price	Mr Peter Hardy	
Mr Nicholas Winterton	Mr Neil Thorne	Mr Jack Thompson	
Sir Michael Shaw	Sir Edward du Cann	Mr Robert Banks	
Mr Gary Waller	Mr Ian Gow	Mr Paul Marland	
Sir John Osborn	Dr Michael Clark	Sir Kenneth Lewis	
Mr John Carlisle	Mr Ken Weetch	Sir Anthony Kershaw	
Mr D. Heathcoat-Amory	Sir John Page	Mr Tam Dalyell	
Mr Alfred Morris	Mr Michael Marshall	Miss Janet Fookes	
Mr Neil Hamilton			

That this House, while recognising the support and assistance granted to the United States Congress and Senate during the past thirteen years by the Office of Technology Assessment, acknowledging that a similar approach is currently being considered for establishment in France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Australia to obtain well-informed and objective assessment, and in considering the rapid growth of technology in the past decade and its impact on economic development, health, environment and so forth, feels that where the need arises that there should be a body at Westminster to advise Parliamentarians of both Houses upon the implications and impact of scientific innovation, the identification of commercially exploitable areas of science, the correct evaluation of conflicting technical data, the collation of information secured from abroad, and the rational use of national resources ; and urges the House of Commons Commission or relevant authority to establish a body within the precincts of Westminster to research, prepare reports and advise Parliamentarians on scientific matters independently of the executive, while at all times subscribing to three crucial elements, namely, that it will accord with British Parliamentary traditions, be funded in part by the House of Commons Commission, and evolve out of the existing structure of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee.

★ The figure following this symbol gives the total number of names of Members appended, including those names added in this edition of the Notices of Questions and Motions.