



Created by the Technology Assessment Act of 1972 [86 Stat. 797], OTA is an agency of the legislative branch of the Federal Government (a copy of the Act is found on p. 50). OTA'S primary function is to provide congressional committees studies that identify the positive and negative consequences of policy alternatives affecting the uses of technology.

OTA assists Congress by identifying existing or probable impacts of technology; alternative technological methods and management programs for implementing specific actions (estimating and comparing the Impacts of alternatives); and areas where additional research or data collection is required to provide support for assessments. (OTA presents its completed analyses to the appropriate legislative authorities and, whenever possible, undertakes whatever additional related activities are necessary.

The Act provides for a bipartisan Technology Assessment Board, a director, and other employees and consultants that are necessary for the Office to conduct its work. The congressional board is made up of six Senators, appointed by the President pro tempore of the Senate, and six Representatives,



appointed by the Speaker of the House, evenly divided by party. In 1991, Rep. George E. Brown, Jr. (D-California) and Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) served as the Chairman and Vice Chairman, respectively, of the board. The two posts alternate between the Senate and House with each Congress. The board members from each Chamber select their respective officer.

The congressional board sets the policies of the Office and is the sole and exclusive body governing OTA. The board appoints the director, who is OTA'S chief executive officer and a nonvoting member of the board.

The Act also calls for a Technology Assessment Advisory Council composed of 10 public members eminent in scientific and technological fields, the Comptroller General of the United States, and the Director of the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress. The advisory council advises the board and the director on such matters as the balance, comprehensiveness, and quality of OTA'S work, and OTA'S nongovernmental resources.

Requests for OTA assessments may be initiated by:

- the chairman of any standing, special, select or joint committee of Congress, acting alone, at the request of the ranking minority member, or at the request of a majority of the committee members;
- | the OTA board; or
- the OTA director, in consultation with the board.

The authorization of specific assessment projects and the allocation of funds for their performance are the responsibilities of the OTA board.

The analytical work of the Office is organized into three divisions, each headed by an assistant director. They encompass assessments grouped in the areas of energy and materials; international security and commerce; industry, technology, and employment; biological applications; food and renewable resources; health; oceans and environment; science, education, and transportation; and telecommunications and computing technologies.

Staff of the Operations Division support the analytical work of the Office. The Operations Division is

divided into three main sections. Finance and Administrative Services includes Administrative Services and Budget and Finance. Information Management and Publishing Services includes Telecommunication and Information Systems, the Information Center, Publishing and Information Marketing. Personnel Services includes the Personnel Office. The Division provides the research staff and management with a variety of services and technologies vital to successful functioning of the Office. The Information Center also provides public access to the full collection of OTA publications, including an online index, and the Publications Unit within Information Marketing handles public dissemination of OTA publications.

The Congressional and Public Affairs Office assists in coordinating OTA'S work with various committees of the House and Senate, by initiating communications between OTA management and staff, and the Technology Assessment Board and the Technology Assessment Advisory Council. OTA publications are then widely dissemi-

nated on Capitol Hill and to the press. (General Information on OTA and availability of OTA publications is listed on the inside back cover.)

FY1991 Activities

The United States finds itself simultaneously propelled by centripetal and centrifugal forces. Domestic problems, such as unemployment, lack of affordable health care, illiteracy, force the Federal Government to focus on internal business at an unusually fine level of detail which encourage a growing degree of isolationism among U.S. citizens. Yet global problems like climate change, loss of control over nuclear weapons, and increasing tensions between the economic “have’s” and “have not’s” force the government’s attentions outward, to focus on affairs far beyond national boundaries.

Concern about the technological changes which may impact the creation of a global economy lies at the heart of many of these problems. OTA provides Congress with thorough, impartial analyses of the potential role of science and technology in creating and addressing the pressing concerns of today . . . and tomorrow.

In FY1991, OTA highlighted the national and international implications of many technologies essential to economic well-being, such as energy supply and demand technologies. To help Congress grapple with domestic energy requirements (in particular the threat to Kuwait’s oil supplies imposed by war), OTA published assessments on U.S. oil import vulnerability and on energy efficiency in the Federal Government. OTA also addressed the energy needs of developing countries, and looked specifically at the contributions of energy consumption to climate change.

OTA furthered its comprehensive examination of the U.S. position in the world economy with studies on such diverse topics as public works infrastructure, trade, and biotechnology. In FY1991, OTA continued to be shaped and guided by the bipartisan Technology Assessment Board, reflecting the explicit needs of the committees of jurisdiction, OTA serves as a shared resource for Congress, providing high-quality analyses of scientific and technological issues that are intrinsic to all important policy decisions, in a cost-effective way.

During FY1991, OTA delivered 44 formal publications to Congress, including assessment reports, background papers, a special report, staff papers, and administrative documents. As of September 30, 1991, 46 approved studies were in progress. An integral aspect of OTA’s assessments includes providing expert advice, briefings, testimony, and results of OTA research to committees throughout the projects.

OTA served over 40 different Committees and Subcommittees of both Houses, typically in response to bipartisan requests.



