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COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE,
TECHNOLOGY, AND SPACE HEARING ON THE FUTURE OF
THE NATIONAL TECHNICAL INFORMATION SERVICE
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MR. CHAIRMAN, I would like to thank you for inviting me to participate in this hearing today. The National Technical Information Service (NTIS) is at an unfortunate crossroads, and the House and the Senate must now consider the future of an organization created by Congress fifty years ago to collect all scientific and technical information for our government. After World War II, our government struggled to collect and organize the materials brought to us by German and Japanese scientists. The government then had to determine how to best use the scientific information that had been collected. It became readily apparent that the United States government needed to form an organization charged with collecting, cataloguing, and archiving all scientific and technical information (STI). It was also the goal of our Nation to share much of this information with the public in order that it benefit the greatest number of people. NTIS was created by Congressional legislation in 1950, and in 1952 began its' role as the repository for all federal scientific, technical, and engineering information.

Since its' creation, NTIS has followed its' mission faithfully and has amassed a collection of over three million pieces. Today, NTIS is threatened by one of the many technological innovations it helped to foster. The ease with which we may now access information through the Internet has hindered the ability of NTIS to remain a self-sustaining organization. Now we must work together to find out what can be done to protect the important public functions NTIS performs and determine what financial burdens should be borne by the federal government, and those that should be borne by NTIS customers.

Today, we have the opportunity to review the proposal brought forth by the

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Department of Commerce in their draft legislation. I am grateful to this Committee for holding a hearing that allows us to take a more in-depth look at the proposal that the Department first brought to my attention in August. Since I was first contacted about the possible closing of NTIS, I have been heartened by the efforts of my House and Senate colleagues to include me in this debate. We have truly been working on crafting a bi-partisan solution that looks at the many different functions that NTIS performs. I have worked with my colleagues from the region to address the very real concerns of the NTIS employees worried about their futures. I have met with the House Committees on Science and on Administration majority and minority members to listen to their thoughts on the future of NTIS. I am also honored to be testifying before your Subcommittee today on the problems facing NTIS.

However, I remain perplexed by the actions of the Department of Commerce. On August 11, I sent a letter consigned by Senator John Warner from Virginia asking to be included in discussions involving the future of NTIS. The Department has never contacted me since their preliminary discussions with me at the beginning of August. I understand they have shared their draft legislation with the relevant Congressional committees but have ignored my request to be involved. Nevertheless, I have reviewed the draft legislation, and I think I know why the Department did not share it with me. It continues to present more questions than answers.

For instance, they have neglected to address the important clearinghouse function that NTIS performs for both federal agencies and the public. They have ignored the comments of NTIS customer communities who expressed concern about limiting access to STI, and they have ignored the concerns of the Library of Congress. Instead, I have been told that the Department has told Members of this body that it is okay if the Library does not want to take on these new functions, Congress can make them do it. The Department is now asking us to be responsible for their ill-conceived proposal.

Since the September 7th Technology House Subcommittee hearing, I have met with the Library of Congress to explore some of the assertions made by the Department regarding the Library's ability to disseminate information on demand. I was particularly interested in finding out about the photo duplication unit that the Department said performed functions similar to NTIS. I was interested to discover that the Library had already calculated how much it would cost for them to make *"The Emerging Digital Economy II"* available to a customer. I am sure many of you are familiar with that report-it is the one the Department has cited as the reason NTIS has outlived its useful existence-that report is free at Commerce's

website, but costs \$27.00 if you order a hard copy from NTIS. The Library estimates that same report would cost them \$29.00 to reproduce for a customer, and would take them an average of four weeks to get to the customer. NTIS' turnaround time is next day if necessary, or five business days including in-house processing. We have not even begun to compare the high volume that NTIS reproduces versus the relatively small number of requests handled by the Library of Congress. Additionally, in the opinion of the General Accounting Office, the Library would need additional Congressional authorization in order to perform the same functions as NTIS.

If we follow Commerce's recommendation, we are essentially creating greater inefficiencies and asking the Library to develop new skills. This will not save the taxpayers money. If this is an honest discussion about reorganizing NTIS, let's work together to come up with a solution best for all involved. Let's start by stating what we know-NTIS provides a valuable public function. They catalog all scientific and technical information so it is more readily available to the public. This costs money-some reports are catalogued that do not make money or subsidize themselves. In order to support this function, NTIS has continued to shop for other functions it can perform that are at the periphery of its' mission. If we believe something similar to NTIS should exist, than we must make a future commitment to appropriate dollars for the public functions. We can also ensure that we find the most efficient way to perform those functions.

A 1998 Arthur Andersen report commissioned by the Department of Commerce looked at how to make NTIS more efficient. That report came up with a number of suggestion that ignored NTIS' role as a public agency. It focused solely on making NTIS an efficient business like Amazon.com, or Borders Books. We can not ask a public agency to become solely profits-driven without anticipating that it will compete with the private sector, or believing it is a function the private sector should perform. However, we can find out the most efficient way for NTIS to operate in our information technology society. We should explore where and how we can create economies of scale that make NTIS' functions more efficient.

Therefore, any reorganization proposal should examine the fugitive document issue, and how the government intends to effectively capture this information to assure that it is not only available to the public immediately, but available three years from now, and ten years from now. A critical statistic that has been overlooked in the early debate on the future of NTIS is: *two-thirds of the documents requested from NTIS are more than three years old, and fall in the three to ten year age range.* Federal agencies can not be expected to have

information in that age range readily available to the public. Most agencies simply do not have the resources available to them to perform that type of function. Additionally, agencies need to be held accountable for their role in creating fugitive documents. For instance, in FY 1993, NTIS received 64,000 documents from federal agencies but in FY 1998 they received only 42,000. Where are those 20,000 plus documents going?

Any future plans for NTIS must also consider the many ways in which NTIS has adapted to changing technology. The Department of Commerce has neglected to mention the many successes that NTIS has accomplished in recent years. NTIS currently maintains an extensive electronic database for demand printing of technical publications. It is my understanding that NTIS employs one of the most advanced digital print on demand technology which is equal, if not superior, to many private sector printers. Additionally, the Department of Commerce has highlighted that it will cost \$30 million to digitize all of the reports contained in NTIS' archive but neglects to mention that 30% of the archive has already been placed in digital format. NTIS has been digitizing reports each time they are requested instead of immediately updating and digitizing all information in their archive. I do not believe that the Department has requested that the Library of Congress immediately digitize the entire NTIS archive. Moreover, Commerce again neglects that it is estimated that anywhere from 30 to 50% of information requests are for copies of rare and hard to find technical documents not readily available on the Internet, or in any bookstore.

I greatly respect the Department of Commerce's concerns about NTIS expanding its functions beyond its core mission. I do not advocate privatizing NTIS, nor do I support allowing a federal agency to compete with the private sector in order to sustain itself. The employees at NTIS have worked diligently to find new opportunities to sustain agency operations. I appreciate their continued efforts to find ways to offset the significant cost of cataloging, and archiving federal research and technical information. However, I think we need to reestablish the preeminence of ensuring the ready availability of scientific and technical information to the public, and determine at what cost to the government that function should be performed. NTIS carries out a clearinghouse functions for all agencies of the federal government. It would be immensely difficult to ensure that agencies are able to provide information to the current users of NTIS in a timely manner. While many federal agencies have developed websites that are comprehensive and user friendly, the lack of uniform standards and lack of knowledge within agencies regarding which reports should be made available to the public could potentially result in the loss of thousands of reports.

The legislation proposed by Commerce would only further complicate this problem. It would require that all agencies post STI materials on their websites for three years than transmitted to the Library of Congress. This problem could mean that the Library develop another skill that NTIS already has-tracking down STI. If we are honest about what happens today and what we would like to have happen in the future, we can eliminate the problems out there and develop real solutions for NTIS and work together on the availability of information to the public.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for holding this hearing today. I am hopeful that this hearing will assist all of us in finding out the needs of the affected communities, and laying out the various options available to NTIS and its devoted employees. As I stated at the September 7th House hearing, I am confident that we can find the best solution for all involved by working through this public process to understand the concerns of the American public at the potential loss of this valuable service.