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PUBLIC PRINTER

PREPARED STATEMENT BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SPACE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

U.S. SENATE

ON

THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE'S PROPOSAL TO TERMINATE THE

NATIONAL TECHNICAL INFORMATION SERVICE

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1999

2:30 P.M.

ROOM 253, RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to participate in this review of the Department of Commerce's plan to terminate the National Technical Information Service (NTIS). Because of the similarities in information dissemination functions between GPO and NTIS, I am here today to ask that Congress consider the transfer of NTIS's collection of scientific and technical information (STI) and associated functions to GPO. In my view, such a transfer would:

- * consolidate the Government's primary information dissemination programs under a single agency, simplifying public access;
- * provide for free public access for the first time to the NTIS collection of STI through Federal depository libraries located in virtually every congressional district nationwide;
- * end duplication and waste in the operation of dual Government publication sales programs which have frequently sold the same items, often at different prices, and potentially bring economies of scale to bear on the sale of Federal STI that may lower NTIS's high document prices;
- * revert the NTIS's performance of printing and publishing services for other Federal agencies to GPO where they statutorily belong; and
- * otherwise ensure the continued availability of Federal STI to the public.

Government Printing Office

Mission. As Public Printer, I am chief executive officer of the GPO. GPO's operations are authorized by Title 44 of the U.S. Code. Our mission for more than a century has been to print, bind, and distribute the publications of the Congress and Federal departments and agencies. We have performed that mission using electronic printing and information technologies for nearly a generation. In 1993, our mission was amended by Congress to include statutory responsibility to provide online access to the Congressional Record, the Federal Register, and other Government publications. Today, our online service, GPO Access (at www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs) is one of the largest and most heavily used Federal web sites, with more than 20 million document retrieved by the public every month.

Staffing. GPO currently has a workforce of approximately 3,300 skilled individuals in printing, procurement, electronic information technologies, documents dissemination, administrative, and related specialties. Most of our workforce is located in Washington, DC. We also have 20 procurement offices and 24 GPO bookstores nationwide.

Finances. Unlike most Federal agencies, GPO operates on a businesslike revolving fund. We are reimbursed by our customers for the cost of work performed. In FY 1998, GPO's revenues totaled \$723 million, yielding net income of \$1.4 million.

Only 15 percent of our annual revenues are derived from appropriated funds. These

appropriations are provided through the Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, and include the Congressional Printing and Binding Appropriation, which covers the cost of work for Congress (\$74.5 million in FY 1999), and the Salaries and Expenses Appropriation of the Superintendent of Documents (\$29.3 million), which primarily pays for the cost of disseminating Government information to Federal depository libraries.

For FY 1998 (as in previous years) we received an "unqualified"-or clean-opinion on our finances in an audit by KPMG Peat Marwick, working under contract with the General Accounting Office.

GPO's Information Dissemination Programs

GPO operates the Federal Government's largest and longest-running information dissemination programs under the authority of the Superintendent of Documents-an official appointed by the Public Printer.

Sales Program. The larger of our dissemination programs is our documents sales program, which is authorized by chapter 17 of Title 44. The program offers about 12,000 titles for sale. Major bestsellers include IRS tax publications, health publications, publications about the Government such as the U.S. Government Manual, and a wide variety of other information produced by Congress and Federal agencies. With few exceptions, the titles are obtained by the program from the work that GPO produces or procures, and include publications in both print and electronic (CD-ROM) formats. Publication prices are established according to a statutory formula. Publications can be ordered via phone, fax, the Internet, or through our bookstores.

The sales program operates entirely from sales revenues and does not receive any appropriated funds. In FY 1998, the program sold approximately 19.1 million copies, generating revenues of \$60.1 million.

Depository Library Program. Another major dissemination program is the Federal depository library program (FDLP), which is authorized by chapter 19 of Title 44. With origins that date to 1813, the FDLP in reality is America's first "freedom of information" program.

The FDLP distributes Government publications to Federal depositories in approximately 1,350 public, academic, law, and Federal agency libraries nationwide. There is a depository library in nearly every congressional district. The libraries are designated as depositories by Senators and Representatives as well as by law. GPO makes available to the libraries copies of all Government publications that are not purely of an administrative nature, cooperatively sponsored, or classified for reasons of national security.

Publications sent to the libraries are funded by the Salaries and Expenses Appropriation of the Superintendent of Documents if they are produced by or through GPO (agencies must pay the cost of producing the publications if they are produced elsewhere than GPO, and GPO pays for the distribution costs).

In return for receiving the publications, the libraries make them available to the public without

charge and provide necessary services, including storing the publications, assisting the public in locating information, and related services. Some estimates put the library community's share of the program at approximately \$10.00 for every \$1.00 spent by the Salaries and Expenses Appropriation. Depository collections are used by tens of thousands of students, researchers, businesspersons, academicians, and others every week.

The majority of the depository libraries are selective depositories, which tailor their Government publications accessions to local needs, choosing from among 7,000 organizational and series categories. Fifty-three libraries, or roughly one per state (depending on size and resources, some States have no regional libraries while others have more than one), are regional depository libraries and receive every publication distributed by the program. They are required to retain the publications indefinitely, providing permanent public access to these resources. Regional libraries also provide inter-library loan and related services to other depository libraries in their regions.

In FY 1998, GPO distributed 14.4 million copies of more than 40,000 titles to depository libraries. Since 1994, when GPO Access began operations, the FDLP has been moving to an increasingly electronic basis. We estimate that approximately 47 percent of all titles that are currently available to the libraries are in electronic format.

Other Dissemination Programs. Under other provisions of Title 44, we catalog and index Government publications, an important ancillary function that helps the public locate information products and services; provide reimbursable distribution services for Federal agencies; distribute publications to recipients designated by law; and distribute U.S. Government publications to foreign governments which agree to send copies of their official publications to the Library of Congress

GPO Access

Our long-standing information dissemination programs are supplemented by GPO Access, which is authorized by chapter 41 of Title 44, enacted by Congress as P.L. 103-40. GPO Access is one of the few Government web sites established by law and one of the longest running. It is virtually the only Government web site that provides easy, one-stop access to information from all three branches of the Federal Government.

GPO Access is available without charge to all users. Originally, we were authorized by P.L. 103-40 to provide free online access only to depository libraries and to charge reasonable fees to all other users. However, the expense of administering an online subscription system, the advent of the World Wide Web, and strong public expectations for free online access to tax-payer funded Government information led us to abandon efforts to collect fees. Today, GPO Access is funded principally through the Salaries and Expenses Appropriation of the Superintendent of Documents (the cost of this service is a fraction of what was originally projected in the committee report on P.L. 103-40, due to technology changes and improvements since its inception.)

GPO Access makes more than 100,000 individual titles available electronically from its own servers, and provides links to an additional 60,000 titles on other Federal web sites. Since the

system began operation in 1994, the public has retrieved more than 400 million documents from GPO Access. Monthly document retrievals today average more than 20 million.

NTIS

We have reviewed a copy of the Department of Commerce's draft legislation, dated September 30, 1999, which would eliminate the NTIS and transfer its collection to the Library of Congress. In our view, the draft has several drawbacks, including provisions that would seriously handicap the operation of the FDLP regardless of the final disposition of NTIS. I have attached our comments on this draft legislation to my statement. The following are my general views on NTIS, which are similar to those I presented to the House Technology Subcommittee on September 14, 1999.

Continued Viability of NTIS Collection. I think the NTIS collection has significant value to the public. (I refer to the assemblage of titles as a "collection" and not an "archive" because, like a library collection, it has ongoing use.) Input we have seen from the library community and the Federal scientific and technical agencies takes the same position. The NTIS collection represents a single point of public sales access to this information.

While increasingly the collection includes documents in electronic format, its paper-format documents are still used. There still appear to be a number of sales of older titles. For persons without access to computers, or for those for whom downloading a lengthy technical report is burdensome, on-demand reproduction of these materials appears to provide a cost-effective method of dissemination.

Is there a future for this central collection given the increase in web postings of STI? I would say there is. The increase in web postings is a situation that everyone in the Government information community-disseminators and users alike-is facing. We are confronting it in the FDLP. An increasing amount of the information made available to depository libraries is in electronic format.

We have been discussing measures with the library community about how best-in this electronic era-to ensure that depository libraries are provided with access to all of the information that should be in the FDLP, whatever the format. Regardless of whether this discussion results in a requirement that agencies must notify GPO whenever a document that is eligible for inclusion in the FDLP is published on the web, or increased investment in an information-harvesting capability for the FDLP, it is clear that new approaches need to be devised for maintaining accessions for any collection in a web environment. Currently, both GPO and NTIS are proactively harvesting the web, seeking electronic publications on agency web sites that would be appropriate to their collections.

There are other reasons that a central collection of STI continues to be viable and necessary in a web-based environment. We are finding-and the library and user communities are finding-that with the increase in web postings there is a growing need to provide assistance to Government information users to locate what they want. The burgeoning use of the Internet increases the need for locator and pathway services, and for the management of Internet-based documents as a

collection.

We have adopted an electronic collection plan for the management of information products in the FDLP. The public needs the same kind of management and services for the STI collection that currently resides at NTIS. The public should not have to experience confusion and frustration in finding Government information on the web. Since 1813, the Government has utilized libraries to provide the public with assistance in finding Government information. The same concept of assistance should be applied to web-based documents. That assistance is most cost-effectively provided through a centrally-managed collection of information.

In addition, the public needs the assurance that STI made available over the web will continue to be made available on a permanent basis. In the web environment, documents are put up and taken down by Federal agencies virtually at random. Without a policy of permanent access, there is no assurance that a document seen on the web by the public today will be available next week. A centralized collection, perhaps utilizing partnership agreements with other institutions (as the FDLP does with other libraries), provides a practical and efficient mechanism for ensuring ongoing availability.

The presence of the web does not argue against the continued utility of a central collection of STI. Instead, it means there is a growing need for centrally-managed services to collect, organize, provide search assistance, and make this collection available on a permanent basis to the public.

Provision of Access to Depository Libraries. GPO has a strong interest in making the NTIS collection available to depository libraries.

Most of the Federal Government publications in the NTIS collection have never been made available to depository libraries by their issuing agencies. NTIS considers the documents in their program to be "cooperative publications," which must be sold to be self-sustaining. They therefore do not assume FDLP responsibility since "cooperative publications" are exempt from depository distribution under current law. With respect to NTIS, this exemption has been upheld by the General Accounting Office.

The NTIS collection currently constitutes the single largest known aggregation of "fugitive documents," so called by the library community because they represent information that should be available to the public through the FDLP but is not.

NTIS has taken the position that it cannot distribute the publications to depositories because that would negatively impact on sales. We do not subscribe to that view. All of the titles we make available to the public through our sales program is also provided to the FDLP. We think the NTIS collection should be made available to depository libraries as a matter of good public policy. In fact, access to the bibliographic database describing the publications in the NTIS collection, as well as the ability to examine the STI publications in an FDLP library, should stimulate rather than limit sales of NTIS documents.

Over the years, we have tried to negotiate FDLP access to the NTIS collection. Recently, we

began a pilot project with NTIS to provide FDLP access to electronic image files of NTIS publications. The project is currently limited to 20 depository libraries, and as of mid-August there were about 42,400 titles in the program. However, we have been forced to accept, as a condition of the pilot, that there will be no reuse or redissemination of the image files outside the libraries that access them, presumably to protect sales of these documents. There are no limitations on reuse or redissemination of any public domain information included in the FDLP. We would like to see expansion of this project to all depository libraries and the inclusion of all public domain information in the NTIS collection in the FDLP without restrictions on reuse or redissemination.

Inclusion of the NTIS collection in the FDLP would also be a major step in simplifying and unifying public access to Government information through a single source. There is already substantial confusion among the public about where to find Government information, about differences in policies on for-free and for-fee access, and other issues. Aiding the public in finding Government information should be a major objective to be achieved in any plan for the future of NTIS and its activities.

I want to make it clear, however, that there would be an appropriations impact associated with making the NTIS collection available to depository libraries. As noted above, the FDLP is funded by the annual Salaries and Expenses Appropriation of the Superintendent of Documents. An increase in the amount of information products made available through the FDLP would increase the appropriation requirement, although in the absence of specific data it is not currently possible to project by how much. In the current year, the appropriation is for \$29.3 million. About \$25 million of this is for the FDLP (\$3.2 million is for cataloging and indexing, while the remainder is for statutory and international exchange distribution).

The amount of increase in the appropriation would depend on how the NTIS collection is made available to the libraries. Depending on the final plan approved for the disposition of NTIS, there may also be an impact on our statutory limitation on full-time equivalent (FTE) employment. GPO operates under this limitation which is established annually in our appropriations legislation.

Sales of Government Information. On a philosophical basis, I think it is reasonable to provide for the Government sale of information products to those who want them and are willing to pay for them, as long as the Government ensures there is equitable, no-fee public access to the information through a mechanism such as the FDLP. Also, the price of the information products should be based only on the marginal cost of reproduction and distribution. This is the basis on which GPO's sales program operates. Objections to NTIS's sales have been raised because there is no other opportunity for access to the collection, and because there is a perception that its prices are too high. Making the NTIS collection available to the public through the FDLP would remove the first of these objections.

There is a potential opportunity for affecting the price of NTIS's products by consolidation with GPO's sales program, although we don't have sufficient data about NTIS's sales program to make a determination at this time. However, consolidation would certainly simplify access to Government information sales products by providing the public with a unified sales interface. It

would unify pricing structures for products that both NTIS and GPO sell. It is conceivable that GPO's much larger sales program could provide economies of scale in the sale of STI products that might lower prices, but that would have to be verified by looking at the data.

A program consolidation would also end the wasteful competition between GPO's and NTIS's sales programs that has occurred in recent years. In providing duplicative sales outlets to the relatively well-defined market for Government information products, GPO and NTIS have simply split revenues for products they both sell. In my view, the competition has not expanded public access to sales products appreciably, nor has it lowered sales prices. Instead, it has jeopardized the continued viability of each program.

Like NTIS, GPO's sales program currently is sustaining operating losses, in part due to the impact of electronics, and in part due to the removal of several best-selling titles from the program by their publishing agencies and their subsequent availability through NTIS. Although we can cover temporary losses through retained earnings, it seems to me that a major step in a long-term solution for the continued health of Government publications sales programs would lie in eliminating this duplication of effort.

Printing Operations. NTIS offers printing and reproduction services to Federal agencies. The information we have seen suggests that the value of these services may be as much as \$1 million annually. I do not have an objection to the provision of printing services by agencies for their own quick turnaround internal administrative purposes. However, Title 44 clearly provides for printing related to Government publications (including forms) must be performed by or through GPO in order to control costs and ensure the public availability of Government information. More than 70 percent of all GPO printing is actually performed through private sector contractors. I hope that any realignment of NTIS activities will return their performance of printing and reproduction services for other Federal agencies to GPO.

Other Comments. The similarities in function between GPO and NTIS, the fact that both are experienced in operating on revolving funds, the potential for valuable synergies of technologies and staff expertise that could benefit public access to Government information—all of these are reasons for a realignment of NTIS functions with GPO.

This is not the first time a potential consolidation has been discussed. It was the subject of negotiations between GPO and the Commerce Department in the early 1980's and an agreement was very nearly concluded at that time. Several years later, when the Commerce Department attempted to privatize the information dissemination functions of NTIS but found no takers, GPO offered to give NTIS a home.

Certainly, more in-depth study of this matter is needed. However, I am concerned that the time for such study may be limited. If, as the Commerce Department plans, the projected closure date for NTIS is the beginning of FY 2001, and if GPO is to take on any NTIS functions, we would need to begin planning now. Our budget submission for FY 2001 will be due before the end of this calendar year. Also, the longer a study lasts, and the longer the uncertainty remains about the disposition of NTIS, the greater the negative impact is likely to be on the talented personnel of

NTIS, who are its greatest resource. In order for NTIS to operate successfully wherever it is finally placed, they will be absolutely essential.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I thank you again for inviting me to participate in this hearing, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.