

Statement by Rep. James P. Moran

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**Before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Subcommittee on Science,
Technology and Space on the Future of the National Technical Information Service**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today.

I am troubled by the Department of Commerce's proposal for substantive and procedural reasons. Procedurally, it is clear that no stakeholders were consulted before Commerce unveiled its plan. The Library of Congress was not consulted. The Government Printing Office, the largest distributor of government information in the world, was not consulted. The community that relies on NTIS documents was not consulted. The National Archives was not consulted. And Congress was not consulted. Failure to meet with these stakeholders ensured that the proposal would be substantively fatally flawed.

The substantive problems with this proposal are numerous. Nevertheless, they all stem from a single source: this proposal was drafted without a clear concept of the role of the government and its agencies in the archival, retention, retrieval, and dissemination of scientific and technical information. A proposal to reorganize or

reinvent NTIS without such an understanding will ensure that important scientific documents are not properly retained. This will cause distress within the communities which rely on scientific data produced by the federal government: We can expect a corresponding decrease in the quality of new research if access to old data is substantially diminished.

First, although it is clear that some **change is** necessary at NTIS, it is not clear that **a** complete overhaul is necessary. For fiscal year 2000, NTIS needs a modest appropriation to pay for public functions. It is certainly appropriate to debate whether NTIS should be entirely self-

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funded or whether taxpayers should pay for the services that benefit the public as a whole. Yet, rather than address this issue, Commerce asked appropriators to provide \$9 million to close NTIS, even though no statutory authority for doing so exists.

The Department of Commerce testified before the House Science Committee arguing that new technology now made much of NTIS obsolete. Furthermore, the Department asserted that in attempting to fully-fund its operations, NTIS had to charge such high fees that customers would either be unwilling to make a purchase or they would look elsewhere. As an example, the Department referenced a particular report which NTIS would sell for \$29 which could be found in the Library of Congress. Interestingly, the Department did not mention that the Library's photo-duplication service would charge virtually the same amount to copy the document. Clearly, the Library does not offer an alternative to sell documents at substantially 'better prices. Furthermore, the Library is not authorized to charge patrons for materials. Its photo-duplication service only exists as a self-funded entity as a result of a private grant.

The Department argued alternatively that agencies should post scientific and technical information on the Internet, thus permitting easy, ready access to all. Certainly agencies should post all the information possible on the Internet, but despite Bill Gates's best efforts, there is still not a computer in every home. In fact, the single biggest group of NTIS customers are libraries. Libraries make this vital information available to those who are technology savvy and to those who must rely on paper products and microfiche. Clearly, the Internet will not provide access to everyone.

But let us assume for a moment that a complete overhaul is necessary -- that NTIS is now somehow unsustainable or outdated. The decision we must then make is to determine what functions of NTIS must be retained and determine who should perform them. Scientific information will continue to be produced. It is obviously valuable to have a central location to locate this information. Can you imagine searching through every

government agency to see whether a particular study had ever been done?

One serious problem with the Department's proposal is its failure to adequately address the fugitive document problem. Fugitive documents are those documents which are not part of the Depository Library system and are not indexed with other government documents. It is virtually impossible to index or search for these documents unless they are part of a well-known collection such as that housed by NTIS. While NTIS and the Government Printing Office have often done battle about the fugitive documents housed by NTIS, NTIS holds a collection which is well-known within the community which uses scientific and technical information. It employs a staff to aggressively search for important documents that are not within its collection. Transferring the NTIS collection without transferring the staff responsible for tracking down documents will only ensure that more scientific and technical documents will escape from the system and be useless for future reference.

I am troubled by the Department's proposal that Library of Congress assume certain NTIS functions, especially since the Library was not consulted. Certainly, the Library can keep and maintain any collection of information. If the primary concern in transferring NTIS was maintaining its collection, the Library would be a good fit. But this ignores the role that the GPO performs in collecting and disseminating information. Unlike the Library, the GPO seeks to retain and disseminate *all* government information to every state. The Library does not retain all information, and it does not disseminate it broadly. Similarly, the Library may not be best suited to take advantage of economies of scale. I urge this committee to carefully consider these complexities in determining which agencies are best suited to take on any NTIS functions which are transferred.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, let me suggest that the best approach might be to step back and take a hard look at the role of the agencies responsible for archival, retention, retrieval, and dissemination of scientific and technical information. Only then can we assess where the functions performed by NTIS should be today and where they should be in the future.