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U.S. House of Representatives
On Transforming GPO for the 21st Century and Beyond: Part 2
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Chairman Harper and Members of the Committee on House Administration, thank you for inviting me to be here this morning to continue our discussion of “Transforming GPO for the 21st Century and Beyond.”

My prepared statement of May 17, 2017, describing GPO’s mission and operations, is already part of the record of these hearings, as are GPO’s responses to 66 questions for the record of that hearing, which were transmitted to the Committee on June 30, 2017.

From a business and digital Government strategy perspective, I am pleased to inform you that GPO is well underway in the effort to supply 21st century digital information products and services as the result of our ongoing transformation from a print-centric manufacturing facility to an information content-centric and customer-focused organization. The milestones of that transformation are detailed in the prepared statement I submitted in May.

Since then, we have continued to support our digital Government strategy. We appeared in support of the House’s Legislative Transparency Day to announce that we have released the digitized bound Congressional Record for the 1950’s, and to update our progress on our initiative to convert key legislative documents to United States Legislative Markup (USLM) language.

Taking note of these and other efforts, the House Appropriations Committee, in its recent report accompanying H.R. 3162, the Legislative Branch Appropriations Act for FY 2018, commended GPO for its “skilled use of digital technology” which has “allowed the agency to constrain the costs of its operations while expanding Government information access options to the American people, bringing greater openness and transparency to the operations of Congress and the Government.” The report additionally directed GPO to assess the costs associated with converting the Statutes at Large from 1789-2002 into USLM XML format.

Concerning constraining costs, as I believe I have pointed out previously, for FY 2018 GPO submitted a flat budget request for its appropriations, which was recommended for approval by the Committee in its report. GPO’s appropriations request is flat for the third consecutive year; the agency’s request for Congressional Publishing has been flat since FY 2014, and for FY 2018 it has been reduced further.

Our overhead costs over the past five years have been reduced to a growth rate that is markedly less than over the previous five years. We have right-sized our staff to meet our mission requirements through buyouts, attrition, and controlled growth, and through hiring and training we are creating a more digital-oriented staff capability where white-collar jobs are now the majority over blue-collar jobs. We are earning payments for the sharing of our space, primarily by legislative branch entities, which helps them save taxpayer funds as well.

We have invested in modern technologies that are already generating savings for congressional work, and we are building new digital systems, such as our composition system replacement project, which has already been deployed in beta to support the production of congressional bills in XML format. GPO's association with the Legislative Branch Bulk Data Task Force has been a fruitful one, resulting in new digital products and services that are, as the House Appropriations Committee observed, expanding openness and transparency for legislative information.

My training and professional background are in business, and from a business standpoint I can tell you, and as I have mentioned previously, that GPO has been able to achieve all of these milestones while operating within the current framework of Title 44, U.S.C. With proper management, the substantive provisions of Title 44 – GPO's business model – can function successfully in the 21st century. This model endows the agency with certain strengths that serve the Congress, Federal agencies, and the public well:

(a) the provision of products and services on a reimbursable basis financed through our Business Operations Revolving Fund, which provides for the allocation of costs on a user basis and permits GPO to recover its costs including those that result from mandated functions such as the Office of Inspector General, while decreasing our reliance on appropriated funding, which today represents just 16% of our revenue stream;

(b) the availability of a technologically advanced Plant Operations infrastructure to provide congressional information products and services in direct support of the constitutional legislative process, a structure whose technological improvements over the past generation have reduced congressional information print costs by more than 70% in constant dollar terms;

(c) a print procurement capability that utilizes competition among available production capacities in the private sector to efficiently support the procurable information product requirements of Federal agencies; and

(d) the linkage of GPO's production and dissemination functions to provide the public with an array of access to official Government in print and digital formats, utilizing our longstanding partnership with the Nation's Federal depository libraries, free public access through our website (FDsys, and now, govinfo) whose offerings cover more than 1.6 million titles from all three branches of the Government, and public sales. Together, these functions fulfill GPO's legislative branch mission of Keeping America Informed, a mission rooted in the requirement of Article I, section 5 of the Constitution.

From a business and digital Government strategy perspective, these are the strengths that should be preserved in any effort to reform Title 44. (As noted in our response to QFR #6, this also was the view expressed by the conferees on P.L. 112-74, who said that several studies evaluating GPO's programs operations had been conducted in the past, and that all such reviews "supported the GPO's business model as the most efficient way in which the government should operate its printing and information dissemination responsibilities." These conferees subsequently ordered the National Academy of Public Administration to conduct a thorough review of GPO, which concluded in 2013 that "GPO's core mission...remains critically important to American democracy.")

By the same token, there are certain provisions of Title 44 that no longer make good business sense. Some of these provisions, such as those addressing specific publications found in some sections of chapters 11 and 13, have been overtaken by more modern practice wherein GPO fulfills the requisitions of Federal agencies for reports, documents, and other publications in the quantities and with the distributions required to meet their modern needs.

Similarly with the provisions concerning production of the "usual number" of congressional documents and those concerning the distribution of the Congressional Record: for many years now, GPO has worked directly with the Office of the Secretary of the Senate, the Office of the Clerk of the House, and congressional committees to establish the number of copies of documents to be produced, a mechanism that not only meets the current needs of the House and the Senate, but which has successfully achieved significant reductions in congressional work without impairing the legislative process. The flexibilities inherent in this modern practice are preferable to setting numbers in law.

Additionally, and as I have pointed out previously, production of commercially procurable work in agency plants continues to increase the costs of the Federal printing program and should be discouraged, though that is potentially a more appropriate subject for the Inspector General community than a task for Title 44 reform.

The provisions of chapter 19 are based primarily on the Depository Library Act of 1962, which made significant improvements to the FDLP at the time but which since then has been eclipsed in some areas by technology, which today provides for more flexibility and innovation in meeting the public's needs for access to Government information.

For example, the statutory definition of "publication," while amenable to interpretation as inclusive of digital formats, could possibly be strengthened by making that language explicit. We now have digital-only depository libraries, which appears to obviate the need for depository libraries to maintain collections of at least 10,000 print volumes. It would be useful to revise section 1904, to provide more flexibility in choosing which kinds of publications that selective depository libraries want to have.

Over the years there have been a variety of proposals for using digital technologies to improve upon the current state-based structure of the depository system, anchored by regional libraries which support statewide systems of selective depositories. With the expanding volume of official digital versions of congressional, agency, and court documents on GPO's websites, which are dedicated to the long-term preservation of these versions, there are appear to be opportunities for libraries to rely on those digital collections instead of print collections, for those libraries that want to have that choice. At the same time, changes to chapter 19 need to also explore how to best secure the value of the print collections that have been distributed to depository libraries for more than 150 years, which constitute a national asset. We have asked the Depository Library Council to develop recommendations on any additional changes.

From a business and digital Government strategy perspective, these are the areas of Title 44 that I see as ripe for review.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I can assure you that we share the Committee's desire to set a clear path forward for carrying out our mission to provide for the information product and services needs of Congress, Federal agencies, and the public in the 21st century. I welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee on the issue areas I have outlined above, and I am prepared to answer any questions you may have.