

United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D. C. 20548

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STATEMENT OF
ELMER B. STAATS
COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON

HSE 01514

H.R. 404, A BILL TO AMEND THE BUDGET AND ACCOUNTING ACT, 1921,
TO DIRECT THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL TO ESTABLISH INFOR-
MATION AND DATA PROCESSING SYSTEMS, AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

I appreciate this opportunity to appear before you to discuss
[H.R. 404,] 91st Congress which would amend section 312 of the Budget and
Accounting Act, 1921, 31 U.S.C. 53 by adding the following new subsections.

"(f) The Comptroller General shall--

"(1) develop, establish, and maintain data
processing and information systems necessary for
the effective and efficient fulfillment of the
substantive responsibilities of the Congress as
may be determined by the President pro tempore
of the Senate and the Speaker of the House;

"(2) cooperate with the Director of the
Bureau of the Budget in the development,

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establishment, and maintenance of a standard data processing and information system (including uniform classifications of programs, activities, receipts, costs, and expenditures, as well as other necessary standards) for budgetary and fiscal data for use of the Federal Government;

"(3) have available in the General Accounting Office employees qualified to conduct and to analyze cost effectiveness studies at the request of committees of the House or Senate;

"(4) to the extent feasible, provide committees of the House or Senate with data and information from such systems or with data otherwise available to the General Accounting Office;

"(5) enter into contracts with organizations or individuals, or employ individual experts and consultants in accordance with section 3109 of title 5 of the United States Code, to assist in the development and establishment of such systems, at rates not in excess of those prevailing at the time for comparable services in private industry, and acquire data processing capacity to carry out the responsibilities delegated him under this

part and to meet any additional requirements for data processing capacity the President pro tempore of the Senate or the Speaker of the House may determine is required; and

"(6) submit recommendations at such times as he deems appropriate to the President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House as to the most effective and efficient manner by which the data processing and systems design requirements of the Congress can be fulfilled.

"(g) To assist in the performance of the duties and functions extended the Comptroller General under this part, there is hereby established in the General Accounting Office a Division for Budget Information and Analysis. The Division shall be headed by a Director who shall be appointed by the Comptroller General and shall receive compensation at the rate provided for GS-18 under the classified civil service."

As we understand it the purpose of the bill is to provide for coordination with the executive branch in the development of one basic compatible data processing and information system to serve both the legislative and executive branches of the Government in providing budgetary and appropriation information. The Bureau of the Budget is in the initial stages of developing such a system. For a part of that compatible system the bill would have the Comptroller General develop, establish, and maintain

data processing and information systems necessary for the effective and efficient fulfillment of the substantive responsibilities of the Congress as determined by the President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. With reference to the other part of that system, the bill would have the Comptroller General cooperate with the Director of the Bureau of the Budget in the development, establishment and maintenance of a standard data processing and information system for budgetary and fiscal data for use of the Federal Government.

It is understood that you, Mr. Chairman, are of the view that there is a need, separate and apart from the maintenance of an information system to assist the Congress in its review of appropriation requests for a legislative capability in advanced cost analysis techniques so that the legislative branch can make its own cost evaluations and have the capability to analyze those made by the executive branch. You have also indicated possible further areas in which the Congress could effectively utilize modern information handling and data processing techniques. For example, the system could be used to provide the congressional committees and individual members and their staffs with immediate information as to the status of legislation. It might also be extended to keep an index of the Congressional Record constantly and immediately available, and for the storage of the entire United States Code, the statutes at large and other similar data.

As you know there are several specific computer operations already under way which could play an important part in the system to be developed for Congress. One of these is Project LITE (Legal Information Through

Electronics). This project for computerized storage and retrieval of legal information is operated by the Air Force Accounting and Finance Center, Denver, Colorado.

Included in the LITE data base at the present time are the published Decisions of the Comptroller General, the United States Code, the Armed Services Procurement Regulations, the Defense Contract Audit Manual, unclassified Air Force Regulations and certain other items of particular interest to the Department of Defense.

We have recently received the first computer generated key word index to the published Decisions of the Comptroller General of the United States from July 1, 1921, to June 30, 1967 (Volumes 1 through 46). This was a cooperative effort between the Department of Defense and the General Accounting Office and utilized the GPO Linotron printing process.

Another system which might be utilized is the one being developed by the Library of Congress to provide information on the status of bills. The Library is now using an IBM 360 model 40 computer with 14 remote terminals. In addition to providing current status information, the system provides a biweekly report containing synoptic and identifying information on bills. It also provides a monthly status report on 200 major pieces of legislation with a bibliography on the subject matter of the legislation.

We are in full agreement with the purposes of the bill. It has been generally recognized that the Congress has a growing need for data

processing and information systems of its own in order to fulfill its responsibilities. As we understand the provisions of H R. 404, the data processing and information systems to be developed for the Congress would not duplicate the system presently being developed by the Bureau of the Budget. The objective would be to develop a supplementary system to serve the particular needs of Congress, yet compatible with the system being developed by the Bureau for budgetary and fiscal data.

With respect to subsection "(f)(1)" of the bill, which would direct the Comptroller General to develop, establish, and maintain data processing and information systems for the Congress, we have some question as to whether the Comptroller General should be given these responsibilities. It may be that the development, establishment, and maintenance of the system should be the responsibility of the Congress itself in order that it could have complete control over the system and thus be assured that its needs will be fully served. However, if the Congress should decide that this task should be performed by the Comptroller General we will, of course, make every effort to carry out the responsibilities assigned.

It should be understood that the development of the systems contemplated, whether performed by the Comptroller General or by the Congress itself, will require considerable time. Ascertainment of the specific needs of Congress and its committees and the systems necessary to serve those needs will a difficult task. Also, it should be recognized that the costs will be significant. Considerable additional funds over and above our present funding levels will be required if the General Accounting Office is to do the job contemplated in the bill.

Subsection "(f)(2)" of the bill requires the Comptroller General to cooperate with the Director of the Bureau of the Budget in the development, establishment, and maintenance of a standard data processing and information system including uniform classifications of programs, activities, receipts, costs, and expenditures, as well as other necessary standards for budgetary and fiscal data for the use of the Federal Government. We construe this subsection to mean that the primary responsibility under the subsection is with the Director of the Budget but that the Comptroller General will cooperate with the Director in an effort to see that the needs of the Congress are met.

With regard to subsection "(f)(3)" we wish to call your attention to progress already made toward establishing the capability in the General Accounting Office to conduct and to analyze cost effectiveness studies. A systems analysis group was established in 1967 in our Office of Policy and Special Studies with the responsibility to provide such capability and to provide leadership and policy guidance in developing appropriate levels of this capability among our professional staff.

The Systems Analysis Group has for example, played an important part in our review under Title II, Section 201(2), of the Economic Opportunity Amendments of 1967 to determine the "extent to which such programs and activities achieve the objectives set forth in the relevant part or title of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 authorizing such programs or activities." It developed last year a comprehensive report on the need for improved policies in the discounting of costs and benefits in cost-effectiveness studies and is currently developing a report to Congress on the status and problems in the planning Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS).

We believe the actions already taken and the experience gained in actual studies have prepared the General Accounting Office to provide an orderly growth of this capability.

We recommend the deletion of subsection "(g)." We believe that the Comptroller General should retain the discretion and the flexibility to organize the General Accounting Office in such a manner as he considers necessary to carry out the duties which the legislation places upon him.

The General Accounting Office would not need new authority to seek funds to carry out the purposes of this bill. Also new authority would not be required for departments and agencies to obtain funds to comply with direct requests made upon them for information in support of appropriations under the Budget and Accounting Act. However, there may be sizable necessary recurring requirements to furnish information which the departments and agencies might not need for their own use. Therefore the Committee may wish to include language in the bill which would authorize appropriations for this purpose.

As previously stated we favor the purposes of this bill and we will make every effort to fulfill such responsibilities as Congress may give us in this area.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement and I will be glad to discuss any of these matters in further detail or answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.