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Testimony

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Efficiency, Economy, and Effectiveness in
Public Printing

Statement of
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Before the
Subcommittee on Procurement and Printing
of the
Committee on House Administration
U.S. House of Representatives



(4837) 112-L

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, as you requested, I am here today to discuss the printing support GPO has obtained for GAO during the past several years.

We use GPO-provided services for typesetting and printing in two basic ways. First, we contract through the agency for reports to the Congress. These audit publications, handled by three contracts, constitute the great bulk of our work and are produced fairly routinely. Second, we contract for our nonaudit publications. These publications, typically contracted individually by GPO, constitute an estimated 10 to 20 percent of our work.

In the 3 years that I have been GAO's Director of Publishing and Communications, GPO has generally provided quality printing service and support. GPO has set up all of our contracts and has provided us with long-term, ongoing programs that enable GAO to "direct deal" with a contractor, such as Program 559 for typesetting audit reports and Program 645 for printing reports, and one-time printing contracts.

In my experience, GPO has professionally helped GAO meet its printing needs by generally doing an effective job on the bidding process and contract administration.

LONG-TERM, ONGOING PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE

GAO's experiences with GPO procurement through long-term contract programs have been very good. GPO has done well in helping us find reliable contractors that can meet GAO's ongoing needs. For example, GPO was very helpful in setting up GAO's automated typesetting contract for audit reports. For the 3-plus years that we have been typesetting audit reports, GAO's typesetting contract (Program 559) has provided excellent service. In addition, through GPO's help, GAO has been able to obtain a commercial printer that has consistently provided 24-hour turnaround time for audit reports (Program 156). Whenever GAO has had to respond quickly to a congressional request, these programs have reliably provided the fast service GAO needed.

TURNAROUND TIME FOR ONE-TIME CONTRACTS IS TOO LONG

In contrast to GAO's generally positive experiences with long-term, ongoing contracts that use direct-deal, GAO's experiences with one-time contracts that require a quick turnaround time and are handled by "main GPO" have not been as satisfactory. Frequently, the earliest delivery commitment GPO can contract for after we submit a printing requisition (SF-1) is 3 to 5 weeks. In urgent situations, this delivery time does not meet GAO's need to provide timely products. In a few cases, GAO has been quite willing to pay additional costs to meet a deadline because we

believe the increased printing costs are more than offset by the necessity that the Congress receive GAO's product on time.

I mention our problems with "main GPO" concerning timeliness because, on the other hand, GAO has been able to consistently rely on GPO's Rapid Response Center (RRC) to obtain commercial printing with a quick turnaround time. GAO's experiences with the RRC have been extremely satisfactory. Through the Center, we were able to print Serving the Congress within 11 days and Controlling Drug Abuse: A Status Report within 10 days. However, GAO would contract more of our nonroutine work through "main GPO," where there is more staff depth to provide technical support, if we could get faster service.

TWO CHANGES THAT COULD PROMOTE PUBLISHING QUALITY

There are two general areas where I believe GPO could foster better government publications. These situations are relevant for both long-term and one-time contracts.

First, when we receive a publication that suffers from quality problems--which occurs on occasion--the process of rejecting the job is more difficult than we believe it should be. The system is cumbersome and does not help customers demand quality work from vendors. I think it should be easier to hold commercial printers responsible for their work. Second, GPO's contracts

normally call for delivery of the required item or its equivalent, for example, a type of paper or a typeface. The provision is designed to foster wide competition. The requirement's downside is that it can result in quality problems when, for example, one publication is in a series and does not "match" others in the same series. I generally support the equivalency requirement but think that flexibility in application is desirable. There may be times when agencies must meet very strict requirements.

GPO SHOULD EXPAND ITS ROLE AS A CATALYST TO PROMOTE THE BEST APPLICATION OF PUBLISHING TECHNOLOGY

While GAO has historically gotten good service from GPO, the world of publishing has greatly changed during the past 10 years and will be changing even more in the future. Currently, GPO plays a largely reactive role of responding to the constant stream of printing requisitions, but I'd like to see GPO become more proactive. One way to accomplish this would be to increase the use of existing term contracts. By promoting agencies' use of more direct-deal programs, the government could reap big benefits. By being less involved in processing agencies' daily printing needs, GPO could be freed from its role of intermediary between agency and contractor. GPO could increase activities that show federal agencies better ways to fulfill their printing needs within budgetary constraints and the policies set by the

Joint Committee on Printing. For example, GPO could make agencies more aware of the specifications for existing program contracts so they can better tailor their printing requirements to take advantage of them and thus achieve faster product delivery.

I think GPO should expand its role by sharing its knowledge of emerging publishing technologies with other government agencies. In essence, GPO should become a catalyst for promoting the best application of new methods. Through an outreach program to federal agencies, GPO could enhance the successful selection and implementation of new publishing technologies, such as electronic typesetting. As a printing consultant to government agencies, GPO could share its expertise to inform them on which publishing developments will most efficiently, effectively, and economically meet their needs.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you or members of the Subcommittee may have.