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BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL

Report To The Congress

OF THE UNITED STATES



LM116918

A Systematic Management Approach Is Needed For Congressional Reporting Requirements

The Congress levies reporting requirements on Federal agencies and others to obtain information on Government programs and activities. In fiscal year 1980, 2,680 reporting requirements produced approximately 4,000 reports at a reported cost exceeding \$80 million.

These reporting requirements are not being managed in a way that achieves the objectives for which they were created. They are managed by several organizations acting independently of each other with little or no coordination among them. As a result, performance of tasks overlaps and functional and informational gaps exist.

GAO recommends that a systematic management approach be developed to insure that reports are timely, that they are distributed to those who can make the most productive use of them in fulfilling their responsibilities, and that both the reporting requirements and report documents reflect the needs of the Congress in its decisionmaking process.



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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON D.C. 20548

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To the President of the Senate and the
Speaker of the House of Representatives

We have identified problems in the way congressional reporting requirements are presently being managed which affect the timeliness and usefulness of the information the Congress receives in support of its legislative, oversight, and budgetary functions. In this report, we recommend a systematic management approach to remedy these problems. This approach would facilitate effective management of the information resource that is created by the reporting requirements. Improvements are needed within all branches of the Federal Government, including the Congress, and the recommended approach addresses them.

We made this review as part of our continuing effort to change and improve congressional reporting requirements as mandated by the Congressional Budget Act of 1974.

We are sending copies of this report to the Chairmen of the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, the House Committee on Government Operations, the House Committee on Rules, and the House Committee on Administration, to the Secretary of the Senate, the Clerk of the House, and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and to other interested parties.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Charles A. Bowsher".

Comptroller General
of the United States

D I G E S T

The Congress levies reporting requirements on Federal departments, agencies, and others in order to obtain information on Government programs and activities, policy issues, budgets, and legislative proposals. In fiscal year 1980, 2,680 reporting requirements produced approximately 4,000 reports at a reported cost exceeding \$80 million. (pp. 4-5)

The congressional reporting requirements are not being managed in a way that achieves the objectives for which they were created. They are managed by several organizations acting independently of each other with little or no coordination among them. As a result, performance of tasks overlaps and functional and informational gaps exist. (pp. 9-11)

Additionally, there is at present no comprehensive monitoring system for the reporting requirements. As a result, there is no way of insuring that the agencies meet the requirements adequately, submit reports when they are due, or disclose that reports are late. The most serious flaws are that the receipt of reports by the Congress is not adequately recorded, delinquent reporting is not followed up, and the distribution and use of report documents are not monitored or evaluated. (pp. 11-15)

Title VIII of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 directs the Comptroller General to:

assist committees in developing their information needs, including such needs expressed in legislative requirements, and . . . monitor the various recurring reporting requirements of the Congress and committees and make recommendations to the Congress and committees for changes and improvements in their reporting requirements to meet congressional information needs ascertained by the Comptroller General, to enhance their usefulness to the congressional users and to eliminate duplicative or unneeded reporting. (31 U.S.C. 1152(d))

In partial and on-going fulfillment of this mandate, GAO has studied the functioning of Federal reporting requirements, focusing on the management of statutorily mandated reports and the information associated with them.

[GAO finds that to transform the currently inadequate information management practices into a more systematic approach that meets congressional information needs, the Congress, the congressional support agencies, and the Executive Office should consider the following actions (pp. 17-18):

- develop uniform policy and guidance for the congressional groups with principal functional responsibility for meeting the reporting requirements,
- streamline the identification and inventory tasks,
- create an adequate monitoring system,
- reduce late executive agency responses to reporting requirements, and
- improve the ability of the Congress to relate each report it receives to the policy and program issues that the reporting requirements are designed to address.

_ GAO recommends a more systematic approach that sets these actions as objectives. They can be met by addressing specific tasks that would help insure that reports are timely, that they are distributed to those who can make the most productive use of them in fulfilling their governmental responsibilities, and that both the reporting requirements and the report documents reflect the needs of the Congress in its decisionmaking process. (pp. 18-19)

The system approach GAO recommends developing would provide comprehensive Government-wide identification and notification of reporting requirements, a means of monitoring reports and report delinquencies, dissemination of reports and associated information, and a mechanism for evaluating and improving the usefulness of report documents and the requirements in the congressional decision-making process. (pp. 19-25)

The Clerk of the House of Representatives, the Secretary of the Senate, and the Office of Management and Budget have reviewed GAO's recommendations, and the issues raised have been resolved. They agree that a systematic management approach is needed to improve the management and use of statutorily required reports. (pp. 25, 27-30)

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ABBREVIATIONS

CISID	Congressional Information Source Inventories and Directories
GAO	General Accounting Office
GAOR	General Accounting Office Recurring Reports file
LEGIS	Legislative Information Status System
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
SCORPIO	Subject Content Oriented Retriever for Processing Information On-line

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Congress constantly seeks new and improved methods of obtaining the adequate and timely information it needs to carry out its diverse and complex legislative and oversight responsibilities. One of the oldest and most frequently used methods is to require by statute that Federal agencies report information to the Congress periodically or report information on the occurrence of events. As of fiscal year 1980, the Congress had mandated 2,680 reporting requirements of this kind, producing approximately 4,000 reports annually at a reported cost to the responding agencies of more than \$80 million. ^{1/} These reports are one of the most important resources the Congress has for informing itself about all branches of the Federal Government. It is therefore important to the Congress that management of this resource meet its needs.

The information the Congress receives in response to statutory reporting requirements is useful for a variety of purposes. It helps the Congress monitor the performance of the Federal agencies as they implement legislation. It helps the Congress exercise appropriate control over the budget. It helps in formulating policies for Federal programs and other legislative initiatives. Therefore, the Congress expects this information resource to be managed systematically and effectively. Accordingly, there is a continuing need to examine the nature of these reporting requirements, the purposes for which they are created, and the ways they are being managed and, if necessary, to find means of improving them.

EARLIER STUDIES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF CONGRESSIONAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Over the past two decades, a number of studies have addressed the reporting requirements of the Congress. In 1960 and 1965, studies conducted by the Senate and House committees on government operations resulted in legislation that modified 11 reporting requirements and eliminated 48 others. ^{2/} Subsequent studies by the Foreign Affairs Division of the Congressional Research Service and the Commission on Government Procurement emphasized that there is a need for an adequate monitoring system

^{1/}These are unverified estimates that agencies supplied us on our request, in which we suggested they compute cost data by using the National Archives and Records Service Guide to Estimating Reporting Costs (1973).

^{2/}Act of June 29, 1960, Pub. L. No. 86-533, 74 Stat. 245, eliminated 25 reporting requirements; Act of November 8, 1965, Pub. L. No. 89-348, 79 Stat. 1310, eliminated 23 reports and modified 11 others.

and offered suggestions for improving the management of information submitted to the Congress.

One of these suggestions was that congressional committees would find useful a subject matter index of all executive reports required for submission to the Congress. Another suggestion was for instituting a system for recording whether reporting requirements have been met and for making inquiry of agencies when they have not submitted their reports on time. This would help insure that information is available when it is needed. Continual study and evaluation of the usefulness of reports were also suggested as aids to eliminating unnecessary reports and improving inadequate ones. 1/

We also have published several reports on the subject. In a 1973 study, in response to a request from the Chairman of the House Committee on Government Operations, expressing concern over the volume and variety of recurring reports, we recommended that legislation be introduced to eliminate or modify some of the statutory reporting requirements. 2/ Additionally, we have examined the universe of reporting requirements and analyzed their usefulness in the Federal budget process, using data from the reporting requirements data base we developed and maintain as required by the Congressional Budget Act of 1974. 3/ In these studies, we further emphasized the need for a monitoring system to make managing and using the reporting requirements more effective,

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Title VIII of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 directs the Comptroller General to:

assist committees in developing their information needs, including such needs expressed in legislative requirements, and . . . monitor the various recurring reporting requirements of the Congress and committees and make recommendations to the Congress and committees for changes and improvements in their reporting requirements to meet

1/Congressional Research Service, Required Reports to Congress in the Foreign Affairs Field, April 22, 1973; Commission on Government Procurement, Final Report [of] Study Group No. 9: Reports and Management Controls, October 19, 1971.

2/"Usefulness to the Congress of Reports Submitted by the Executive Branch," U.S. General Accounting Office, R-115398, October 26, 1973.

3/"Analysis of Requirements for Recurring Reports to the Congress," U.S. General Accounting Office, PAD-80-72, April 18, 1980; "Using Congressional Reporting Requirements in the Budget Process," U.S. General Accounting Office, PAD-81-24, December 18, 1980.

congressional information needs ascertained by the Comptroller General, to enhance their usefulness to the congressional users and to eliminate duplicative or unneeded reporting. (31 U.S.C. 1152(d))

In partial fulfillment of that mandate, this report continues our effort to study the functioning of the reporting requirements. Accordingly, we focus here on the management of statutorily mandated reports and the information associated with them. In particular, we analyze whether these are managed in a way that meets the Congress' needs in performing its legislative and oversight responsibilities.

In chapter 2, then, we examine the universe of reporting requirements. We also identify the elements of the reporting requirements that are useful to the Congress. In chapter 3, we analyze the roles of the various organizational entities in their operation and management of the reporting requirements and the reports generated in response to them. We also assess the degree to which the reporting requirements provide timely information. In chapter 4, we recommend a systematic and comprehensive approach for improving the way the statutory reporting requirements supply the Congress with the information it needs.

We have not attempted, however, to review, analyze, or evaluate the quality of information in the report documents or the extent to which the information is used, its usefulness, or its effect on the legislative process. Our intention is instead to recommend a systematic approach that can improve the management of the information resource. It is probably evident that improving the information management will facilitate an assessment of the quality of the information.

To ascertain the present status and functioning of the reporting requirements from their enactment through the delivery of report documents, we analyzed in depth our Congressional Information Source Inventories and Directories (CISID) data base. CISID contains reporting requirements spanning the years 1789 to 1980. This file contains information on statutory, nonstatutory, and voluntary reporting that goes to the Speaker of the House, the Secretary of the Senate, individual committees, and the whole Congress.

We supplemented this analysis with a study of additional data from the office of the Clerk of the House, which gave us the dates report documents were received in the House of Representatives. We also interviewed officials of the offices of the Clerk of the House, the Secretary of the Senate, and several Federal agencies, in order to obtain the perspectives of individual organizations on the problems of effectively managing the reporting requirements. We sent a copy of a draft of this report to the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Office of Management and Budget, and our response to their comments appears at the end of chapter 4.

CHAPTER 2

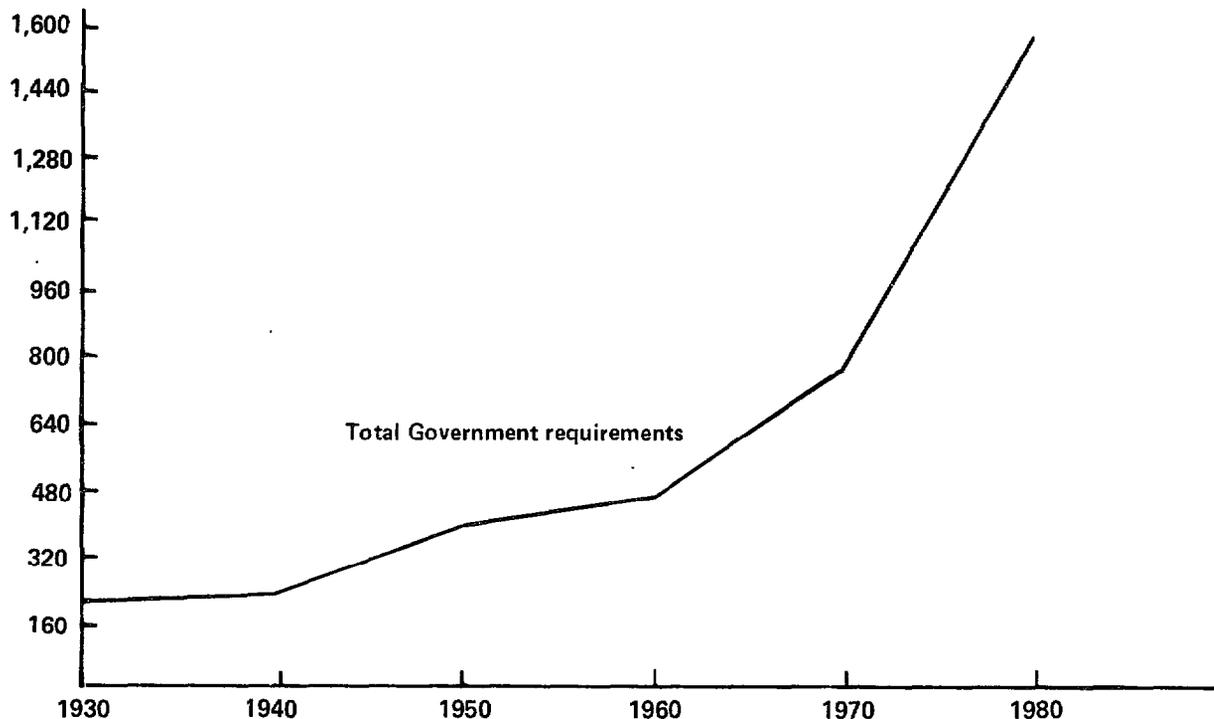
THE NEED FOR SYSTEMATIC MANAGEMENT OF THE INCREASINGLY COSTLY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AS AN INFORMATION RESOURCE

According to records that the Clerk of the House of Representatives keeps, the number of statutory recurring reporting requirements increased from 197 in 1930 to 1,566 in 1980. This is a rise of 695 percent in 50 years. Growth from the 1930s through the 1950s was relatively moderate, but in the 1960s and 1970s the number of reporting requirements increased rapidly, rising from 470 in 1960 to 759 in 1970 and to 1,566 in 1980. (See figure 1.)

The numbers appear to correspond closely to the growth in Federal Government programs and activities, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. They also reflect the desire of the Congress to hold agencies accountable for conducting programs and carrying out policies in accordance with congressional intent, even at considerable direct cost to the Federal Government. This volume and variety of reports has, as a major information resource, tremendous potential for facilitating congressional decision-making. Both the Congress and the executive branch are becoming increasingly aware, however, that to be useful and cost effective, information must be managed well.

Figure 1

Growth of Reporting Requirements 1930-80



Source: The Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, "Reports To Be Made to Congress"

The greatest number of requirements appears to have been levied on cabinet-level agencies and the President of the United States, although many reports submitted by the President to the Congress originate in agencies. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these numbers represent only the number of reporting requirements, not sums of individual reports. The precise number of reports actually submitted to the Congress is difficult to determine for several reasons.

For one, many reports are to be submitted only on the occurrence of events that cannot be accurately predicted. For another, due dates as expressed in the legislation are often vague. Additionally, some requirements may apply to more than one agency, but the legislation may not specify exactly which ones or how many. Finally, the lack of adequate records makes exact counting virtually impossible.

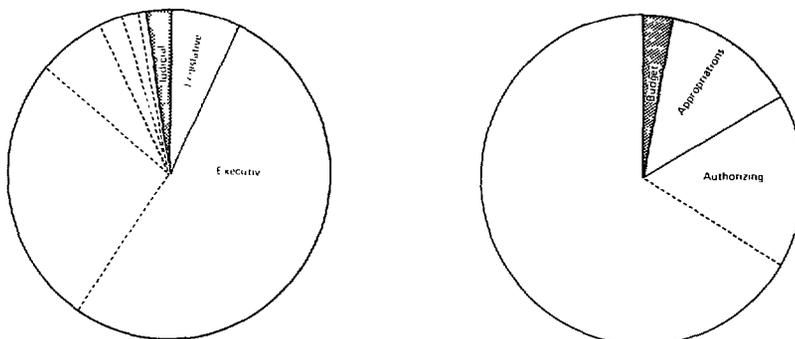
WHERE REPORTS ORIGINATE
AND WHO RECEIVES THEM

As figure 2 shows, the Congress mandates reports from all branches of the Federal Government. According to the 1980 inventory of reporting requirements in our data base, some 250

Figure 2

Sources and Recipients of Congressionally

Required Reports 1980 (Percentages Read Clockwise)



Sources

250 agencies, 2,680 requirements

- 1.0 Judicial branch
- 5.0 Legislative branch
- 94.0 Executive branch
 - 54.6 Cabinet-level agencies
 - 28.6 Principal agencies and commissions
 - 6.4 Other agencies, commissions, and councils
 - 3.3 Federally chartered corporations
 - 1.1 Office of the President

Recipients

50 committees, 4,000 reports

- 1.0 Budget
- 16.6 Appropriations
- 82.4 Authorizing
 - 25.7 Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, House Committee on Government Operations
 - 56.7 Other authorizing committees

Federal agencies and federally chartered corporations respond to 2,680 requirements with about 4,000 reports annually. (The inventory of the Clerk of the House contains only statutory requirements addressed to the Speaker of the House of Representatives for the Congress, and this accounts for the discrepancy between 1,566 and the number in our broader data base.) Almost all these reports--about 94 percent--originate in executive agencies. The legislative branch accounts for 5 percent of the requirement, while only about 1 percent originate in the judicial branch.

The cabinet-level agencies respond to 54.6 percent, or more than half, of all the requirements. The most numerous among these--31 percent--come from the Departments of Defense, Energy, Interior, State, and Health and Human Services. Increasing numbers of reports also come from the President, although they may be prepared in the departments and agencies.

A small number of reports come from the federally chartered corporations. Among these are the Communications Satellite Corporation, the Consolidated Rail Corporation, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Most of these reports are annual or financial reports and tend to support congressional oversight responsibility for legislation and budget control.

Some 50 House and Senate committees receive the reports. Individual committees receive reports deriving from as few as one to as many as 386 requirements, depending on committees' jurisdictions and the Federal agencies and programs they monitor. About 82.4 percent of the reports addressed to committees go to the authorizing committees, 16.6 percent go to the appropriations committees, and 1 percent go to the budget committees. Two committees alone--the House Committee on Government Operations and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs--receive about 25.7 percent of all these reports, reflecting the complexities of operation of the Federal Government and intragovernmental matters.

THE TYPES OF REPORTS SUBMITTED

The reports submitted to the Congress contain a great variety of information. One writer has classified them by their potential use, proposing the three broad categories policy-making, "post facto," and advance notification. ¹/ Policy-making reports require responding agencies to submit program studies or evaluations and to propose legislation. Policy-making require-

¹/John R. Johannes, "Statutory Reporting Requirements: Types, Trends, and an Assessment," printed as a chapter entitled "Statutory Reporting Requirements: Information and Influence for Congress," in Abdo I. Baaklini and James J. Heaphey (eds.), Comprehensive Legislative Reforms and Innovations (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), pp. 33-60.

ments, which include most one-time requirements, thus usually require a responding agency to undertake a major study because the Congress has deemed it necessary and to make recommendations based on that study for further legislative action. For instance, the Energy Security Act requires the Office of Science and Technology Policy and the National Academy of Sciences to submit to the Congress a report that includes the major findings and recommendations that result from a comprehensive study of the projected effect on the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere from fossil fuel combustion, coal conversion, and related synthetic fuels activities authorized in the Act, among other sources (42 U.S.C. 8911).

"Post facto" reporting requirements direct the responding agencies to submit reports on various contingency situations or on actions they have taken annually or at other regular intervals with respect to given programs or activities. For instance, the National Climate Program Act requires the Secretary of Commerce to submit a report annually to the President and the authorizing committees of the Congress that contains a summary of achievements of the National Climate Program and other program-related information (15 U.S.C. 2906). The frequency of these reports usually indicates how closely the Congress wants to monitor programs. Most activities connected with the sale of weapons, for example, require the President to report to the Congress within a specific time.

Advance notification reporting requirements mandate responding agencies to notify the Congress before they act, before they spend, or before they make a determination that becomes binding. For instance, the Secretary of Defense must notify the Congress of the location, nature, and estimated cost of any facility to be used by Reserve components of the Armed Forces that will cost more than \$175,000. No expenditure may be made until after the expiration of 30 days from the notification date (10 U.S.C. 2233a).

The examples above illustrate the type of information called for in the reporting requirements and the variety of objectives that the Congress attempts to achieve through them. The categories are not exclusive, however. Many "post facto" reports, for example, also contain policy-making information or speculate on forthcoming activities.

THE COST OF PRODUCING REPORTS

The direct costs associated with responding to the growing number of reporting requirements represent a considerable investment of time and resources. As we indicated in chapter 1, we required the Federal agencies to provide us with cost data on their reporting requirements. Complete, consistent, and precise data are not available for all the agencies, however.

According to data the agencies gave us, responding to the 2,680 requirements cost the agencies at least \$80 million in

fiscal year 1980. The executive branch, including the principal agencies, commissions, and other entities within it, responding altogether to about 94 percent of the requirements, reported its costs for preparing recurring reports in fiscal year 1980 at more than \$75.5 million. Costs to the legislative branch were more than \$5 million, to the judicial branch about \$0.01 million (a little more than \$12,000), and to the federally chartered corporations and others about \$0.7 million (or somewhat more than \$700,000). These figures do not include the costs associated with managing and administering the information resource, which are not known.

CONCLUSION

The volume and variety of reports prepared at considerable cost to the Federal Government in response to congressional reporting requirements represent a major information resource. This resource has tremendous potential for facilitating congressional decisionmaking. It is our opinion that in order for this resource to be useful and cost effective it must be managed well.

CHAPTER 3

THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN MANAGING REPORTING REQUIREMENTS SYSTEMATICALLY AND EFFECTIVELY

To serve as an effective resource, reports generated in response to reporting requirements must be managed systematically. The critical elements for systematic management are as follows. The system must allow identification for individual reporting requirements, their due dates, and their recipient committees. It must make visible the Federal agencies' responsibilities for preparing and submitting documents in response to the requirements for reporting on their activities. It must contain a mechanism for monitoring the submission of reports to the Congress. It must facilitate dissemination of the reports and other information related to them. It must contain measures for assessing the usefulness of the reports and the information they contain.

Historically, these functions have been performed by several organizations acting independently, with no effective coordination among them. Some of the functions are performed by only one organizational entity; others are carried out concurrently by several entities, with varying degrees of completeness and success. As a result, gaps exist in the system and, therefore, opportunities for streamlining it to make it more efficient and effective.

In particular, remedies should be found for the following characteristics of the way the reporting requirements are managed. No single entity coordinates the various sets of responsibilities. Several organizations have been assigned similar duties. There is no comprehensive recording and monitoring system. Report due dates as stated in legislative requirements are sometimes vague, affecting their timeliness. Finally, the congressional committees cannot easily relate specific reports to specific legislative requirements. We discuss these issues in the remainder of this chapter.

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The tasks of managing and administering the reporting requirements are performed by the Congress itself, particularly through the congressional committees, and by the Clerk of the House of Representatives, the Secretary of the Senate, the General Accounting Office, and the Federal agencies. In the discussion below, we analyze the responsibilities each of these organizational entities has as well as the way they fulfill those responsibilities.

The role of the Congress is to initiate the reporting requirements and to use the information that is generated from them. Because the requirements help the Congress oversee Federal programs and obtain information on policy issues, budgets, and

legislative proposals, it expects the reporting requirements to be administered according to its intent. In particular, the Congress expects the report documents resulting from the requirements to be managed responsively and cost effectively.

The Clerk of the House of Representatives prepares and transmits annually to the Speaker of the House a list of the reports that officers and departments must make to the Congress. ^{1/} The list is arranged by the branch of the Government and by agencies within each branch. For each requirement, the list identifies the report title and description, the agency responsible for submitting the report, the legislative citation mandating the report, and the report's due date. This inventory is computerized and maintained in a computerized publications system. House Information Systems is incorporating a tracking feature in this system that will report the receipt of reports and that will be part of the computerized Legislative Information Status System (LEGIS).

Right now the Senate has no comprehensive system for managing reporting requirements. In the office of the Secretary of the Senate, however, the Assistant Reporter maintains a computerized log of "executive communications." As a communication arrives in the office of the Secretary, the Parliamentarian receives it and assigns it a control number, notes the committee that has responsibility for the matters covered in the communication, and sends it to the committee.

The U.S. General Accounting Office maintains a data base on congressional reporting requirements in accordance with title VIII of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974. The data base identifies reporting requirements addressed to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate as well as those addressed to individual House and Senate committees. Each record includes the title of the report, the name of the agency preparing it, the requisite frequency and due date of the report, the legislative authority for it, its appropriations account title and code, the names of the committees responsible for the subject matter, a synopsis of the reporting requirement, an abstract of the report's contents, and cost data for its preparation. The data base is kept current through legislative research and annual requests to the agencies to supply updated information.

^{1/}This function of the Clerk is set forth in rule III, clause 2, of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives. See also Reports to Be Made to Congress, communication from the Clerk of U.S. House of Representatives, transmitting a list of reports which it is the duty of any officer or department to make to Congress, pursuant to rule III, clause 2, of the Rules of the House of Representatives, January 16, 1981, House Document No. 97-12 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981).

Reports from the executive agencies that the President is required to submit to the Congress must be approved by the Office of Federal Information Policy in the Office of Management and Budget. OMB simply determines that nothing in the body of a report is contrary to any policy of the administration. OMB does not compare the substance of the report with the legal requirements, nor does it monitor agencies' preparation procedures.

Congressionally mandated reporting requirements stipulate that Federal agencies are to submit reports to the Congress at stated times or intervals or when certain events occur. Most agencies' congressional liaison offices note the reporting requirements for which they are responsible and maintain an organizational machinery to respond to them. The report preparation procedures used by the various agencies are far from uniform, however.

OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE THE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Where responsibilities overlap and other deficiencies in the procedure of fulfilling the reporting requirements make them less useful than they could be, there is obviously room for improvement. Table 1 on the next page summarizes the duties of the organizational entities that perform the individual functions of the process. It lists the tasks and who performs them, and it also shows the areas in which improvements could be made. (Note that two tasks are not currently being performed.) We discuss these in the remainder of this chapter.

Identifying the reporting requirements

Both the Clerk of the House and the General Accounting Office are required to identify reporting requirements and to maintain lists, or inventories, of report due dates and other elements these entities identify. The inventory that the Clerk maintains lists reports submitted to the Congress as a whole. Although the inventory has not done so in the past, it does now also identify the committees having oversight responsibility for the reports submitted to the Speaker of the House and it identifies reports to specific committees. After the reports have been logged in, they are distributed to the appropriate committees. 1/

The data we collect come from our own legislative research and from information the agencies supply us in response to an

1/The Congressional Research Service maintains information on terminating programs for the standing committees of the Congress, in accordance with Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, as amended, section 203(d)(2), and is planning to identify all reporting requirements, including those associated with the terminating programs.

Table 1

Reporting Tasks, Who Performs Them,
and Needed Improvements

<u>Task</u>	<u>Performed By</u>	<u>Improvement</u>
Identify due dates of submissions to the Congress.	House Clerk, GAO	Eliminate duplication of effort.
Identify due dates of submissions to committees.	GAO	Systematize committee review of requirements by jurisdiction.
Identify reporting requirements by committee jurisdiction.	GAO	Same as task above.
Identify reporting requirements by agency.	House Clerk, GAO, other Federal agencies	Develop guidelines and procedures.
Prepare and submit reports.	Federal agencies	Improve report timeliness and relevance.
Disseminate reports.	House Clerk, Senate Secretary	Institute coordinated services for distribution.
Log reports.	House Clerk, Senate Secretary	Improve the logging system.
Monitor reports and follow up reporting delinquencies.	committees	Cannot now be accomplished without improving identification tasks and instituting a monitoring system.
Identify requirements for congressional action upon receipt of reports.		Categorize these requirements.
Assess user satisfaction with reporting requirements operation.		Develop a feedback mechanism.
Change or eliminate reporting requirements as necessary.	committees, OMB, GAO	Implement a systematic process.

annual request we make of them. We research the legislative history of every statute that contains a reporting requirement and, in doing so, we identify the committees that have jurisdiction over each reporting requirement. In our annual requests, we provide each agency with a computer printout from our data base. Each printout lists the existing requirements for reports that we have identified as that agency's responsibility. With this, we also send a list of new requirements arising from legislation affecting that agency in the most recent Congress. We ask the agencies to update, confirm, or refute the elements of this information that are not in our data base, such as the date of submission of a report document in response to a reporting requirement.

The Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate record report receipt dates. The Clerk's office checks off receipt dates against its inventory of due dates. The Secretary's office does not do this because the Senate does not maintain an inventory, but the Assistant Reporter of the Senate does record receipt dates for all "executive communications" received, including reports received in response to reporting requirements.

The most efficient process for accomplishing these tasks would be to have only one organization collecting the data and sharing it with the others. The development of uniform guidelines and procedures would help insure this efficiency in identifying and maintaining data. It would probably also enhance the usefulness of this particular information.

Report timeliness

The lack of a comprehensive monitoring and tracking system encourages reporting lateness on the part of the agencies, as we indicated in an earlier study. ^{1/} In that report, we analyzed 2,000 requirements for the fiscal year 1979 reporting period. Using data from the reporting system of the Clerk of the House, we compared the recorded due dates with the recorded receipt dates for 1,132 of the 2,000 reports. (We excluded the remaining 868 requirements because they were not due in fiscal year 1979 or because the due dates were predicated on the occurrence of events that could not be determined.) The results of that comparison are shown in table 2 (on the next page), revealing that more than three-fourths of the statutorily mandated reports we examined were more than 30 days late, two-thirds were more than 90 days late, and one-half were more than 180 days late.

Lateness can sometimes be attributed to the wording of due dates in the reporting requirements. When a requirement is not specific, tardiness may be encouraged. Examples of vague

^{1/}"Using Congressional Reporting Requirements in the Budget Process," PAD-81-24, U.S. General Accounting Office, December 18, 1980.

Table 2
Delinquency of Executive Agency Reports
in Fiscal Year 1979

<u>Days late</u>	<u>Number of reports</u>	<u>Percentage of reports</u>
0-30	246	22
31-90	125	11
91-180	195	17
181-360	<u>566</u>	<u>50</u>
Total	1,132	100

wording are "after each quarter" and "after the end of the fiscal year." Examples of some of the least definite terms are "whenever appropriate" and "from time to time." A significant number of annual requirements do not have specific due dates, although 5 U.S.C. 2952 stipulates that these should be submitted at the beginning of each session of the Congress. It is not known whether agencies adhere to this law, but given the rate of delinquency, it would appear that they do not.

When the Congress indicates that it needs information to facilitate its decisionmaking, clearly that information should be timely. Reports on programs and activities that are received after decisions have been made about the issues they address are of marginal utility at best. Tardiness on the part of the agencies responsible for submitting information in response to requirements can be reduced, however. Establishing an adequate monitoring and tracking system and using clear legislative language in which to express due dates could help accomplish this.

Monitoring and distributing reports

At present, the Congress cannot determine whether all required reports are submitted, because it does not have a complete or central listing of all the reporting requirements. As we have shown, the Clerk of the House inventories only reports sent to the Congress or the Speaker of the House, the office of the Secretary of the Senate does not attempt to identify any reporting requirements, and currently we try to identify all new reporting requirements but, in the past, we did not list information such as one-time reports, notifications, and determinations. Therefore, no historically complete data base exists. Thus, the Congress has no systematic way to follow up on delinquencies.

Moreover, since committee recipients are not identified until a report is received, the committees cannot easily determine all reports that are scheduled to be received. The Clerk's document shows what reports are due but not who should receive them. The log of the Secretary of the Senate, created as reports are

received, identifies the recipient committees at that time. Also, some reports go directly to committees and their receipt is not recorded by either the Clerk of the House or the Secretary of the Senate.

This difficulty is compounded by the fact that there is also at present no mechanism for categorizing reporting requirements by type. For example, there is no way to tell which requirements have congressional review provisions--that is, which ones require agencies to give advance notification at a specified time before carrying out certain activities. If the Congress would easily identify and respond to these and other requirements, it could perform its oversight responsibilities more efficiently. 1/

Some monitoring and tracking problems originate with the legislation. Reporting requirements are levied to elicit as much information as possible about the program or activity being carried out under the legislation. Broad information requirements may, therefore, be vague, and this in turn can affect the timeliness of agency submissions. Moreover, agencies do not always indicate the requirement they are responding to, and sometimes they fail to date their report documents. Finally, because reports may go to the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, or the committees directly, proper logging and monitoring are difficult.

The mechanisms currently maintained by the organizational entities responsible for distributing, monitoring, and tracking reporting requirements are very passive. Information is therefore not as useful as it might be, and its dissemination does not always facilitate the decisionmaking process. Because there is no systematic way to monitor, follow up on, or obtain feedback about the usefulness of the information that derives from the reporting requirements, there are gaps in the information flow. These gaps constitute serious flaws in the way reporting requirements are presently being handled. The individual mechanisms would be more effective if they were oriented systematically toward the specific information needs of the Congress.

EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN THE CURRENT PROCEDURES

The organizations that have tasks in the reporting requirements process are aware of many of its deficiencies and are taking steps to make improvements. Each recognizes that the Congress is not getting the information it needs. The Clerk of the House, for example, has recently reviewed the House

1/The Congressional Research Service maintains an inventory of legislation requiring congressional action on proposals from the executive branch. However, there is no evidence that the Congress is making any systematic use of this information.

monitoring and tracking capabilities and has identified the precise requirements that will be needed for an information system. These are that it must identify committees, have tracking capabilities, generate periodic reports to committees, and issue warning notices of reports that are due. The House Information Systems is now putting such a system into place.

Similarly, the Secretary of the Senate is planning a system to satisfy information needs in the Senate. To assist the Senate leadership, committees, and others, the Parliamentarian's office is especially interested in identifying which reports require congressional review, approval or disapproval, or deferral. The Senate has already developed the specifications for this congressional review system.

The General Accounting Office plans to make its present system more responsive by disseminating information tailored to specific users. For the congressional committees, we will generate special listings by report due dates. We will also perform special analyses and searches based on information in our data base. We will continue to monitor and assess committee information needs to identify obsolete, duplicative, or otherwise unnecessary reporting requirements. The Congressional Reporting Elimination Act of 1980 (Pub. L. No. 96-470), resulting from the cooperation of the General Accounting Office and OMB, eliminated 53 separate reporting requirements and modified 41 others after its enactment on October 19, 1980. We will work with OMB to develop criteria for the future elimination of other unnecessary reporting requirements. Corrective efforts need continued emphasis and continued support, however. Therefore, we recommend a more systematic approach, which we present in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND AGENCY COMMENTS

CONCLUSIONS

To exercise its legislative oversight and budget control responsibilities, as well as to obtain information adequate to support its decisionmaking, the Congress levies reporting requirements on Federal agencies. The reports submitted in response to these requirements constitute one of the most valuable information resources available to the Congress. As it is currently managed, however, this resource has grown to be very large, inefficient, and costly.

There is little evidence to indicate that the legislative reporting requirements are being managed in a way that achieves the objective for which they are created. In many cases, similar or the same responsibilities are shared, requiring close cooperation and consistent policies and procedures that, on the whole, do not exist. The documents prepared in response to the requirements represent substantial direct cost to the preparing agencies, yet there is no comprehensive monitoring system that can insure that the agencies meet the requirements adequately, submit reports when they are due, or reveal when reports are late. The most serious functional gaps are the absence of a comprehensive monitoring system to record which agencies submit reports on what dates and who receives them, to follow up on delinquent reporting agencies, and to track the distribution and use of the information contained in the report documents.

In view of this, and in view of the rapid rate of growth of congressional reporting requirements together with the generation of associated information, we find that a comprehensive and systematic management approach is needed. Comprehensive and systematic management will increase the likelihood that this valuable information resource will influence the quality of congressional decisions in a positive manner.

To successfully transform the traditional ad hoc practices from their passive or, at best, marginal sensitivity to congressional needs into an approach that is active and extremely sensitive, the Congress, the congressional support agencies, and the Executive Office should take the following actions:

- develop uniform policy and guidance for the congressional groups with principal functional responsibility (Clerk of the House, Secretary of the Senate, and GAO),
- streamline the identification and inventory tasks (Clerk of the House, Secretary of the Senate, and GAO),

- implement an adequate monitoring system (Clerk of the House, Secretary of the Senate, and GAO),
- reduce executive agency lateness in responding to reporting requirements (the Congress), and
- improve the ability of the Congress to relate each report it receives to the policy and program issues that the reporting requirements are designed to address (the Congress and executive agencies).

Therefore, in the rest of this chapter, we outline an approach for comprehensive and efficient management of reports submitted to the Congress by Federal agencies in response to statutory reporting requirements.

RECOMMENDATION FOR A SYSTEMATIC MANAGEMENT APPROACH

We recommend a system approach be developed for managing statutory reporting requirements that, in addition to helping insure that reports satisfy the intent of the Congress, will achieve the following objectives:

- This system approach will provide information to the Congress on the timeliness of report submissions.
- It will facilitate the monitoring of reports so that agencies will be encouraged to respond in a timely way to the requirements they are responsible for.
- It will facilitate the collection of data on the usefulness of the reports to the Congress that can be used to further improve the system by eliminating redundant requirements and others that no longer meet congressional needs, adjusting document due dates as necessary, and modifying the contents of the requirements to reflect the changing needs of the Congress.

In recommending this approach, we recognize that a number of organizations already perform actively with respect to the reporting requirements. Accordingly, we suggest the management approach be based on the following assumptions:

- The approach should continue to use the resources of the existing organizational entities. The offices of the Clerk of the House, the Secretary of the Senate, the congressional committees, the General Accounting Office, and the other Federal agencies have special experience to contribute to the approach, and where feasible and cost effective, this has been recognized and built into it.
- The approach should be active. Because research and experience show that successful information systems reach out

actively to their users, strategies will be developed for the approach so that it will accurately target its user groups and deliver information to the Congress that meets its needs.

--The approach must provide a feedback mechanism. To make the approach more responsible to congressional needs, it will provide for better resource management and greater economies of operation and cost effectiveness than now exist.

The system's components

The information system approach we recommend has four major components:

- requirements identification and notification,
- report logging and monitoring,
- information dissemination,
- report use and feedback.

This approach forms a closed loop made up of the following sequential elements:

1. The Congress enacts legislation, which may contain new or revised reporting requirements.

2. The Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate, working in collaboration with GAO, coordinate the identification of these requirements.

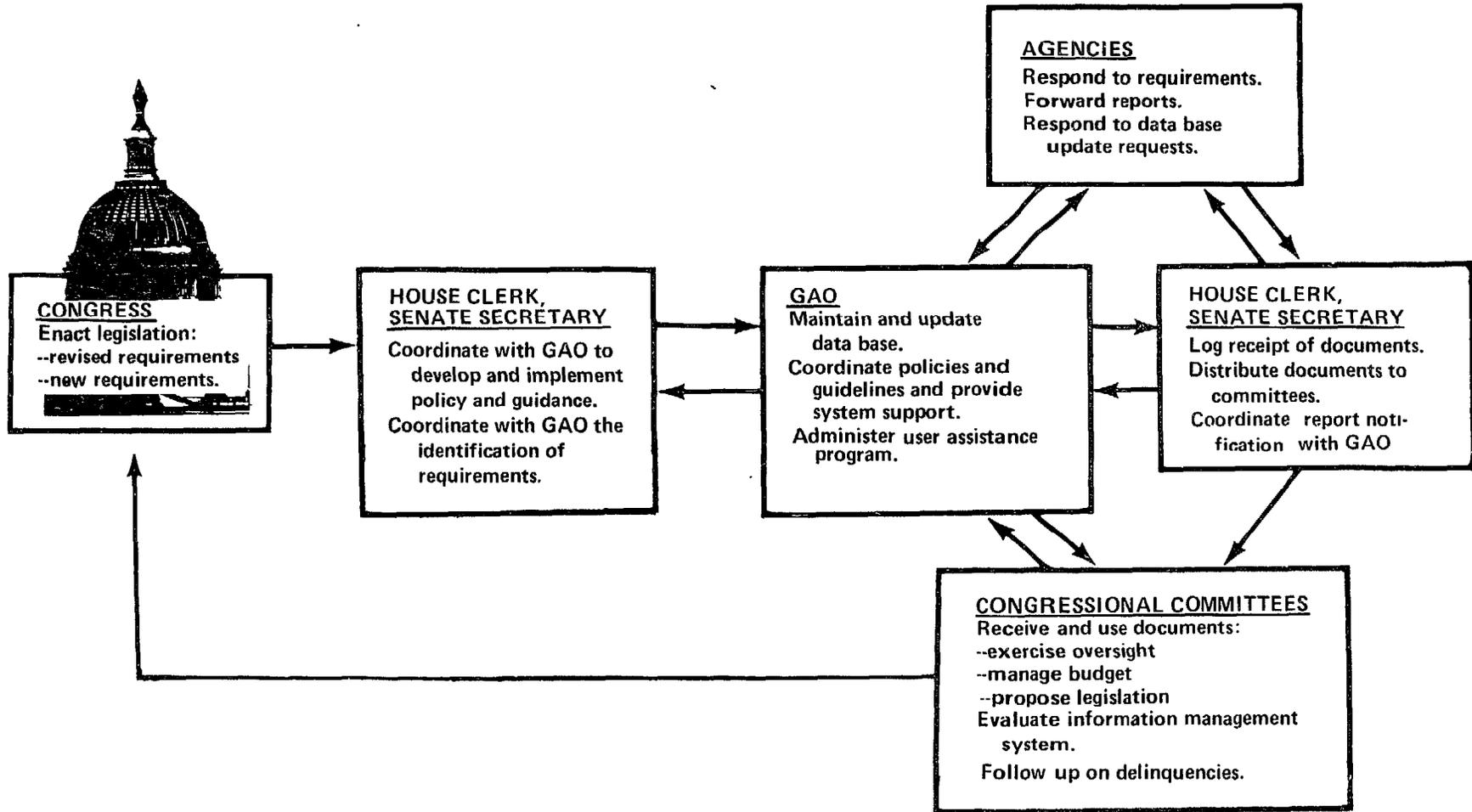
3. The Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate, in collaboration with GAO, enters new and revised requirements into the data base, thus updating the annual reporting requirements inventory. The Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate transmit requirements to the appropriate congressional committees for review and verification. Requirements will also be transmitted to the appropriate Federal agencies for notification.

4. An enhanced report logging system is put into place and maintained in the offices of the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate.

5. The Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate receive reports from the Federal agencies, log them in, and disseminate them to the appropriate congressional committees. The reports notification function is coordinated with GAO.

6. Congressional committees monitor reports, following up on delinquencies, and use the reports in their oversight, budget control, and related legislative and decisionmaking activities and

Figure 3
An Overview of a Systematic Management Approach
for Congressional Reporting Requirements



inform the GAO about the usefulness of the reports and the operation of the system.

7. The Congress modifies reporting requirements to meet its changing needs, basing its decisions on information gained through the operation of the system.

Figure 3 illustrates the interrelation of the approach's four components and their looped sequence. In the sections that follow, we describe the four components in detail.

The requirements identification and notification component

The organizations that identify reporting requirements work independently and often obtain different results. Moreover, agencies often fail to recognize reporting requirements that have been levied on them. The language used in creating the requirements lacks uniformity, and there are no guidelines to facilitate identification.

The system approach we recommend will vest primary responsibility for coordinating the identification of new reporting requirements with the offices of the Clerk of the House of Representatives and the Secretary of the Senate. Minimum identification will consist of a title or a description of each reporting requirement, the agencies responsible for responding, the frequency and due date of response, a legal citation of the statutory authority for the requirement, the names of congressional recipients, the interest codes of recipients, and a statement of the congressional action that is required.

A working group consisting of representatives from the offices of the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House as well as representatives of the House Information Systems and GAO will develop guidelines for identifying requirements, determine the type and extent of information to be collected for each requirement, and provide policy guidance with coordinating this step with the operation of the rest of the information system.

After identifying new requirements, the offices of the Clerk of the House and Secretary of the Senate will make this information available through its on-line system or magnetic tape, together with an audit trail of changes in the existing requirements, to GAO. This transmission will initiate the annual inventory update of our data base. The Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate, in collaboration with us, will then send the information to congressional committees for their review and verification of the appropriate requirements and to the appropriate Federal agencies as notification of the reports that are required of them. The agencies will note new requirements and changes in existing ones, send us the necessary inventory data, and set up a mechanism to respond to the requirements. Discrepancies between

committees and agency reviews will be corrected in the data base and all who are concerned will be notified of the corrections.

The report logging and monitoring component

This component is the processing control center of the entire information system. Its activities will take place in our offices, in the offices of the other Federal agencies, and in the offices of the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate. The system will take full advantage of existing systems such as LEGIS.

As we indicated earlier, to meet our obligations under title VIII of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, we already maintain a comprehensive, computerized data base on reporting requirements. We record 2,680 recurring and one-time requirements with all or some of the following: title or subtitle, agency, frequency or due date, appropriations account title and code, legal authority, congressional recipients, synopsis of requirement, abstract of report contents, subject terms, agency contact, and cost data. We update the data base with annual inventories. In the recommended system approach, we will further enhance the data base to accommodate additional monitoring and use data. From this data base, we will compile, monthly or quarterly, and send to each Federal agency a list of reports that that agency is required to submit during the following reporting period.

We will encourage the Federal agencies to submit reports to the Congress when they are due. Estimates, appropriations, and all other communications from the executive departments intended for the consideration of House committees and addressed to the Speaker of the House will be referred by the Speaker as provided by House rule XXIV, clause 2. For reports that must for security reasons go directly to a congressional recipient, the submitting agency will send a notification and an unclassified summary, if feasible, to the Clerk and the Secretary.

Reports submitted to the Congress should contain a transmittal letter that will incorporate the following features. It will include a brief and precise statement of the requirement to which the report responds. This statement will include the public law name, number, and section, the U.S. Statutes at Large volume and page, and the U.S. Code title and section. The transmittal letter will be attached to an executive summary of the report if the report exceeds 10 pages, highlighting its major recommendations of action for the Congress. The letter will also indicate any action that the Congress is supposed to take in accordance with the reporting requirement, and it will state whether the timing of this action is critical in any way.

The offices of the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate will log the receipt of the reports as they are submitted by the agencies. These two offices will forward the

reports to the appropriate congressional committees. The committees will follow up with the agencies on delinquent reports.

The dissemination component

The dissemination component will be administered by the offices of the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate. GAO and the Congressional Research Service will participate in and give active support to this component. At a minimum, the component's activities will be to provide report notifications, disseminate reports and their executive summaries, and update the data base in the on-line search systems.

We will initiate the report notification activity, by producing lists, arranged by recipients with designated interests, of all the reports due in a given reporting period. The lists will be distributed to their addressees by the offices of the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate. In this way, prospective users can anticipate reports, and information use will be promoted. Beyond the officially designated recipients, others may be interested in the reports, and for these we will develop a user data base to support the necessary notification and dissemination activities. As soon as the reports are received and logged in by the offices of the Clerk of the House and Secretary of the Senate, these offices will forward them to the officially designated recipients.

All congressional committees and their staff now have access to our reporting requirements data file, the General Accounting Office Recurring Reports file (GAOR), in SCORPIO, an on-line system maintained by the Congressional Research Service. Additionally, on demand or in anticipation of a need, we will perform special searches, prepare special listings, and conduct special analyses of reporting requirements data.

The use and feedback component

With those three components in place, required reports to the Congress should be timely and offer maximum potential for making positive contributions to congressional legislative, oversight, and budget responsibilities. Enacting new or modifying existing legislation with respect to reporting requirements should make more meaningful the reporting demands that are made on the Federal programs and activities. All this will be made possible by collecting information on how the information system approach works, particularly on how the reports are used. The details of the use and feedback component will be worked out with the congressional committees. Information obtained from this component will allow us to evaluate reports and services and offer suggestions about their usefulness.

We will process and analyze the information to determine how well the approach works and to seek opportunities for further

improving it. As more empirical data become available, we will design and conduct analyses of the usefulness of required reports for congressional legislative, oversight, and budget functions. These studies and data will present an objective basis for eliminating requirements that no longer meet the needs of the Congress, improving the contents of the requirements so that they accurately reflect the changing needs of the Congress, and seeking economical and cost effective operation of the reporting requirements system.

AGENCY COMMENTS

We reviewed our findings and recommendations described in this report, as well as some technical systems matters not covered here, with the Clerk of the House of Representatives, the Secretary of the Senate, the Office of Management and Budget, the Senate Computer Center, and the House Information Systems. They agreed generally with the approach we have outlined.

We sent a draft of this report to the Clerk of the House of Representatives, the Secretary of the Senate, and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. The House, the Senate, and OMB all agreed that the systematic management approach we recommend in this report is needed. Letters from the Clerk, Senate, and OMB commenting on the draft, which included some technical details not included in this version, are printed in an appendix to this report. There were several issues raised involving the roles and responsibilities of each organization. We met with each organization and discussed the points in detail. No issues were left unresolved.

WILLIAM F. HILDENBRAND
SECRETARY

United States Senate

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

July 10, 1981

Mr. Morton A. Myers
Director
Program Analysis Division
U. S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Myers:

As requested, we have reviewed the draft report entitled "An Information System is Needed for Congressional Reporting Requirements," and have enclosed a copy with our corrections and comments. We are in general agreement with your recommendations and do agree that there is a need for better control over these reports.

Our principal concerns relate to the subsystem as you have proposed it and the assignment of responsibility for the various activities.

First, the staff in the Secretary's Office would not be involved in the review of legislation to identify reporting requirements. It was our understanding that GAO now reviews the legislation and provides the information for entry into the recurring reports data base (GAOR). Our office neither has the staff available to undertake this type of research nor believes that it should be a function of the office. Assuming that GAO will continue to be responsible for this activity, our main concern is the timeliness of the review process. Specifically, that any new legislation which contains reporting requirements be added to the data base within 30 days of passage. This is particularly important to assist in identifying one time reporting requirements.

Second, the report logging function would be our responsibility and we would need to work closely with GAO personnel and the Senate Computer Center to develop the automated system. Our current plans are to expand the capabilities of the communications subsystem in Legis and to provide a link to the GAOR file. However, the monitoring responsibility, we believe, rests with the appropriate Senate committees. If the system is designed as we envision it, the committees will be able to obtain the status of reports due them at their computer terminals and they would also have the capability to print any listings they may need.

Third, as we have stated in our meetings with GAO personnel, the key to the system will be the accuracy and specificity of the legal citation for each reporting requirement. Unless the transmittal letters accompanying these reports contain that information, we would not be able to incorporate the logging function into our daily work using existing personnel, nor would

- 2 -

we have the information to access the data in the GAOR file. We also indicated in our meetings that we are in the process of developing a legislative review file to assist the Senate leadership and committees in identifying those reports which are time sensitive and to keep track of the elapsed time.

I hope our comments have clarified our position and if you or your staff need any further information, please contact Ms. Marilyn Courtot (224-2020).

Sincerely,



Enclosure



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

JUL 24 1981

Mr. Morton A. Myers
Director
Program Analysis Division
U. S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Myers:

On June 25, 1981, you wrote to Director Stockman requesting views on your draft report entitled "An Information System Is Needed for Congressional Reporting Requirements."

As you know, the Office of Management and Budget is interested and involved deeply in reports to the Congress, both in terms of reviewing reports and in ensuring that reporting burdens placed upon executive branch agencies are necessary and reasonable. Last year's legislative initiative to reduce reports to the Congress, which resulted in enactment of the Congressional Reports Elimination Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-470), involved close cooperation between GAO and OMB staffs, and I am certain that future relationships between our agencies in this area will be equally cooperative and productive.

Regarding contents of your draft report, we have the following general reactions and recommendations:

1. We endorse GAO's proposal for the development of an information management system for reports to Congress;
2. We agree that GAO has the lead responsibility in this area, and an information management system similar to that proposed could aid GAO materially in overseeing Congressional reporting requirements;
3. We advocate OMB having a policy and coordination role in the identification of reporting requirements that are no longer necessary, or that impose unreasonable burden upon executive branch agencies. The draft report does not sufficiently emphasize the importance of evaluating the need for, utility of, and benefit/cost of reporting requirements;
4. We believe that OMB should not become routinely involved in monitoring agency adherence to schedules for submitting reports to the Congress (p. 4-2 and table 3);

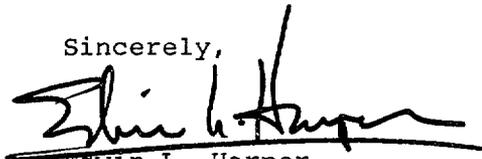
5. We suggest that GAO should, in cooperation with OMB, develop specific criteria for determining the continued need for each recurring report and that on a regular schedule each requirement be assessed against these criteria.

In addition to the above comments, we have the following specific suggestions:

1. Reports submitted to OMB are not reviewed by the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) (p. 3-4). OIRA's responsibility is in policy and coordination of Congressional reporting requirements. The last item on table 1 should reflect this;
2. Some mention about last year's legislative initiative should be included in the final report.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to review your draft report.

Sincerely,



Edwin L. Harper
Deputy Director

Edmund L. Henshaw, Jr.
Clerk

M. Raymond Colley
Deputy Clerk

Office of the Clerk
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

September 21, 1981

Mr. Morton A. Myers, Director
Program Analysis Division
U. S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Myers:

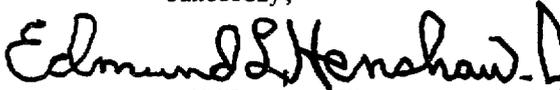
On June 25, 1981, my office received a draft copy of a General Accounting Office report entitled "An Information System is Needed for Congressional Reporting Requirements". Your cover letter accompanying the report requested that the report be reviewed and commented on by the Office of the Clerk.

Please note that the enclosed Evaluation Report, prepared by the Clerk's staff contains the requested comments and suggestions. Although the Congressional schedule made it impossible to meet the response date originally suggested in your letter, informal comments were verbally presented to your staff on August 17, 1981. Those comments are more precisely documented in the attached report.

Please advise me if you would like any additional information in this regard. I look forward to having our staffs cooperate in the design and development of an automated system as is more fully described in our enclosed comments.

With kind regards, I am

Sincerely,


EDMUND L. HENSHAW, JR., Clerk
U. S. House of Representatives

Attachment

COMMENTS ON A GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE DRAFT REPORT ENTITLED: AN
INFORMATION SYSTEM IS NEEDED FOR CONGRESSIONAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

OFFICE OF THE CLERK
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
September 21, 1981

OVERVIEW

On June 25, 1981 the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives received a draft report from the General Accounting Office (GAO) entitled 'An Information System is Needed For

Congressional Reporting Requirements'. This letter reflects the comments of several individuals in the Office of the Clerk and House Information Systems (HIS) who have read and evaluated the GAO study. The evaluators were:

Paul PAYS, Assistant Bill Clerk, Office of the Clerk
Steve Smith, Staff Assistant, Office of the Clerk
Laurice Walton, Information Systems Specialist, HIS
Susan Miller, Information Systems Specialist, HIS
William Freeman, Assistant Division Manager, HIS

In addition to the above individuals, comments were received from Robert Burlington, Congressional Research Service (CRS), Library of Congress. CRS is currently designing and developing an on-line computer system to identify terminating programs pursuant to the mandate of section 203(d)(2) of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, as amended. In addition, CRS anticipates the inclusion of reports due to Congress as an additional feature of their on-line system. This system will contain an indexing capability, information as to the department or agency responsible for the report, committee and subcommittee jurisdiction, Public Law and bill in which the reporting requirement is established, date of the original legislation, a statutory or U.S. Code citation, a brief abstract of the reporting requirement, and the date on which the report is due to Congress.

One of the duties of the Clerk of the House is to compile and

publish a list of reports required to be filed with Congress. This list is compiled for the Clerk by the Bill Clerk's office. It is published once a year, as soon as possible after the close of the previous session of Congress. Usually this results in the document being published in the first quarter of any calendar year. Beginning with the 1981 publication, the list of reports was entered onto the House's ATEX publication system for automated editing and typesetting. Throughout 1981 all additions, changes, and deletions to the list will be made directly into the ATEX file by the Bill Clerk. The 1982 edition will be printed from that file. This process saves several weeks in the typesetting editing, and printing cycle over the previous manual typesetting and editing process.

An additional service of the Office of the Clerk through the Bill Clerk's Office is the compilation of data concerning reports actually received by Congress. This information is passed to House Information Systems for entry into the LEGIS system jointly maintained by HIS and the Office of the Clerk.

In the spring of 1981 the Office of the Clerk requested that HIS develop an on-line information system to record information relevant to reports required to be filed with Congress. This system ultimately will enable the Clerk to eliminate some duplicate manual and data entry steps by tying the ATEX publication file and the LEGIS system to the 'Reports Due' system. The latter will generate an ATEX publication file when required.

It will also trigger the automatic updating of LEGIS when it is

used to record the receipt of a Report. The marriage of these capabilities will enable the Clerk to provide lists to each committee of reports due within 37 days, 53 days, 97 days, or as otherwise specified. It will also enable the Clerk to advise committees (in the same notice) of reports that are overdue and how long they have been overdue.

Finally, it will include a third section of reports due to the committee on unspecified dates such as 'annually', 'upon each occurrence', within 67 days of taking action', etc.

As this brief overview suggests, the Clerk and HIS are currently undertaking many of the proposals set forth in the GAO study. However, there are some features of the GAO study that the Clerk and HIS jointly disagree with or that we would propose performing in a

different fashion. Therefore, unless these points are resolved, the Office of the Clerk cannot unconditionally concur with the disclaimer on page iii of the Digest of the GAO study that says, of the GAO's proposed system, 'The Clerk of the House of Representatives, ...agree not only that it is needed but that it should be implemented according to the timetable GAO suggests'.

From our review of the GAO study we conclude that the plan as put forth is initially and primarily a procedural plan to make additional use of the existing GAO batch system for tracking Congressional reporting requirements. Given the necessity of providing timely information to the Committees concerning what reports are due or

overdue, we do not agree that the proposed GAO system will come remotely close to meeting those needs.

Additional specific disagreements are listed on the following pages in straight page number sequence. They are of several types, including disagreements with GAO statements or conclusions, suggestions of alternative methods of accomplishing a task suggested by GAO, modifications or amplifications of statements to stress the perspective of the Clerk in various procedural matters, and a considerable number of descriptive statements amplifying plans and system designs already underway in the House to meet several of the shortcomings noted by GAO in the current manual or nonexistent procedures.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Page 1-2. In reference to the suggestion that it would be useful for Congressional Committees to have a Subject Index of all required reports, it should be noted that the House currently indexes all Executive Communications (upon receipt) in the LEGIS data base. The index vocabulary being used is the list of SITM's (Subject Index Terms) compiled and used by the Library of Congress Bill Digest Division to index and print the annual Digest of General Bills and Resolutions. There are approximately 175 SITMs, 51 of which are the names of the states and the District of Columbia. These SITMs are particularly well suited for indices that are printed. Such indices generally are done at two or more levels, using the same basic SITM list in at least the first two levels.

A list of SITMs currently used is attached as Appendix 1. As more of the Clerk's legislative publications are produced automatically from existing automated data bases (LEGIS), SITMs will be used as a standard indexing vocabulary for printed output.

A second standard of legislative indexing is the Legislative Indexing Vocabulary (LIV terms), also compiled and standardized by professional lexicographers at the Library of Congress. These LIV terms are better suited for indexing when a document will be later retrieved on-line by use of key words or subject matter. These terms are used in the House, Senate, and Library of Congress versions of LEGIS/SCOPPIO. There are several thousand LIV terms and any one LEGIS document may be assigned an unlimited number of such terms.

It is strongly suggested that any GAO system for indexing reports should use the SIM and LIV standard index vocabulary.

CHAPTER 2: THE NEED FOR SYSTEMATIC MANAGEMENT OF THE INCREASINGLY
COSTLY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AS AN INFORMATION RESOURCE

Page 2-1: The SAC report notes that '...the number of statutory reporting requirements increased...to 1,555 in 1982'. It should be noted that the Clerk's office has identified 2,189 reporting requirements in the 1982 'Reports Due to be Made to Congress' and 2512 reports in the 1981 edition, exclusive of reports required to be submitted directly to committees.

Obviously, any system (automated or manual) with responsibility for tracking reports due and received and with responsibility for notifying congressional committees or executive agencies of delinquencies, must reconcile the varying reporting requirements identified by the House, Senate, GAO, Library of Congress, or other entity that records and tracks such data for its own purposes.

The Clerk would not be willing to participate unconditionally in a system, or rely on a data base over which we did not exercise some degree of control as to content. The degree of control could be total, or if shared, would of necessity require a means of identifying reports of interest to one organization but not another.

As a practical matter we do not envision a workable system containing only reports due as identified by a single organization. More likely, any system for tracking delinquent reports would need the ability to identify reports of interest to only one entity (i.e., the House, Senate, or Library of Congress).

For example, a data base of interest to the Senate would include

reports that are required to be submitted only to the Senate (treaties) as well as those required to be submitted to both houses of Congress. The House would not be interested in reporting treaties in its annual compilation of 'Reports Due...', nor would the House want to include them in its LEGIS data base.

Likewise with GAO's interest in including in its file, all reports from executive agencies, including voluntary reports. Thus, we suggest that any centralized or shared data file have the capability of assigning one or more 'organizational interest' codes to reports. These codes would enable users to include/exclude reports from on-line or batch processing. Such a code will be part of the Clerk/HIS 'Reports Due' data base.

CHAPTER 3: THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN MANAGING REPORTING REQUIREMENTS SYSTEMATICALLY AND EFFECTIVELY

Page 3-1: This page notes that the system 'must contain measures for assessing the usefulness of the reports and the information they contain'. It is our opinion that any automated data base need not and should not attempt to capture this type of data. The Clerk is an administrative support agent of the House and does not care to make policy decisions of this sort. Usefulness will be left entirely to the committees to determine.

In addition, the experience of HIS in designing automated systems that rely on voluntary data entry or written/verbal feedback from committees is entirely negative. A Committee Meeting and Scheduling Information System (COMIS) was designed with committee feedback as an integral component. With no way to enforce data entry or response by the committees, the effectiveness of the system was considerably reduced. It is our opinion, based on experience, that the system should not be designed to include 'usefulness' feedback from committees.

Page 3-3: ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES: In the synopsis of organization responsibility we suggest that under the procedures of the Clerk, mention should be made of the fact that the document currently produced by the Bill Clerk is done so on a quasi-automated system of typesetting and publication (ATFX).

In addition, mention should be made of the LEGIS system operated by the Office of the Clerk with technical support provided by HIS.

LEGIS is a major automated system of the House (and also, of the Senate and the Library). It is the ultimate receptacle of information about reports made to Congress. It will be used extensively in the future to print information about legislative activity in the House. Any automated system for tracking reports due to Congress will become a source of data entry into the LEGIS system, by creating a transaction file when a report received is matched against the list of those due, and then tagged in the system, as having been received.

The concept of single source data entry in the entire legislative area is the subject of a major HIS study being undertaken at the request of the Clerk. Any system designed to deal with legislative records and documents must be considered in light of the overall plan of the HIS Legislative Information Concept.

FOOTNOTE 1: Reference was made to House Document No. 87-12. The several reviewers of the GAO study assume that the correct document number is 97-12.

Page 3-4: Following the discussion of the current GAO system for monitoring reporting requirements we suggest that mention be made of the Congressional Research Service/Library of Congress system currently under development. The system currently being designed and developed by House Information Systems for the Clerk does take into consideration the requirements of the Library and their current design plans.

Further, the Clerk will suggest to CRS that, since the House data base will accommodate all CRS data requirements, CRS not duplicate data

entry and tracking of reporting requirements. Rather, we will offer CkS a daily transaction file from our system to use to update their version of the data base (Scorpio). Any study of the current environment that purports to offer a long range plan for a tracking system should take into consideration all organizations that need to use such a system.

Page 3-5: Under the heading 'Identifying the Reporting Requirements' it is noted that the Clerk monitors only reports submitted to the Congress as a whole and that the Clerk does not identify reports submitted directly to specific committees or subcommittees. This has been the Clerk's policy in the past.

However, beginning in 1981 the Office of the Bill Clerk began reviewing current legislation for any reporting requirements specifying direct submission to committees. In addition, efforts will be made to review all Public Laws from the 96th Congress for similar requirements. Over the next few years we will attempt to expand this research to prior Congresses to identify all such requirements. Any reporting requirements discovered will be included in the Clerk's publication of 'Reports to be Made...'

On the same page it is noted that the Clerk's list of reporting requirements does not include the committee having oversight responsibility for the reports submitted. However, our on-line data base will include both House and Senate committee codes identifying the committee(s) to which a report should be sent. At such time as the on-line data base is used to automatically produce the Clerk's

list, consideration will be given to the inclusion of committee codes in the report. In the meantime, the House LEGIS data base does include the names of all House committees to which any report has been forwarded.

Page 3-8: The GAO study suggests that late submissions of reports could be reduced by the use of clear legislative language to express due dates. While the Clerk agrees with this evaluation, there does not seem to be an easy solution to the wording of legislative reporting requirements considering the wide range of members, committees, and staffs responsible for drafting legislation. Addressing the problem via the House and Senate Legislative counsels may be one approach. Along these lines, we are enclosing as Appendix 2, a representative list of various reporting dates used in reporting requirements. These categories will be included in the on-line system currently under development as will be the capability to include other language or specifications. Any system developed must have the flexibility to allow such diverse and unstandardized language if it is to be responsive to the members and committees who draft legislation requiring reports to Congress.

Page 3-9: The Clerk agrees completely with the concern that there is currently no mechanism allowing the committees to be advised, either in advance or after the fact, of all reports due. The on-line system being developed for the House will solve this problem. The system, scheduled to become operational in early 1982, will provide monthly lists to each committee identifying reports due sorted by various date

criteria such as: due within 30 days; overdue by less than 30 days; overdue by more than 30 days; and, due at unspecified times after the occurrence of an event or in contemplation of an action by an executive agency or department.

Page 3-17: The GAO report notes that the Clerk is now reviewing House monitoring and tracking capabilities. However, since publication of the draft study, we have identified precise requirements for our on-line tracking system. These have been spelled out in HIS document number DN-1178 and may be obtained from HIS.

CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY AND PROPOSAL FOR A COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION SYSTEM

The reviewers of the GAO study find a number of objectionable points and suggestions in this chapter. Many of them would probably be unworkable if an attempt is made to put them into practice. They relate, for the most part, to any attempt by a system, be it the Clerk's, GAO's, the Secretary of the Senate's, or the Library of Congress's, to evaluate use and usefulness of reports or to follow up on delinquent reports. These functions are the responsibility of the several committees of the House and the Senate. The Clerk will not usurp these committee functions.

Page 4-3: The proposed GAO system 'will collect data on the usefulness of the reports'. The system currently being designed by HIS will not, at the request of the Clerk, attempt to record any measure of usefulness of reports.

Page 4-5: In the GAO conceptual overview of the ultimate system it is suggested that GAO will enter new and changed reporting requirements into the data base. The reviewers suggest that so long as the Clerk is monitoring all statutory reporting requirements, the House data base should be made available to GAO either on-line or in batch format on magnetic tape for automated entry into a GAO data base. GAO could then add data such as abstract narrative, GAO accession number, agency contact, and other supplemental data not obtainable at the time the basic reporting data is identified and entered by the Bill Clerk.

Page 4-5: The GAO study suggests that GAO will transmit a list of

reporting requirements to appropriate Congressional committees. We strongly suggest that so long as GAO maintains a batch system, any report submitted by GAO to a committee will be so out of date as to be no longer useful. Further, since the House tracks all reports received, the Clerk's on-line system will have the capability to list all reports due to a committee, by specified date or otherwise, and it will also be able to list the date that each report is actually received in the house, the executive communication number assigned, and if applicable, the House Document number assigned. It will also be able to list any other House committee receiving the same report.

The Clerk's system will be able to provide this information to committees as much as one year before the GAO system could provide the same information. Also, since the Clerk's system will be developed on the STAIRS data management system currently used by member and committee offices to access LEGIS and the Member Information Network (MIN) at the House, House offices will be able to do ad hoc on-line searching and retrieval of the Clerk's data base from existing terminals with no new training.

The suggestion that a report logging and monitoring system, supported by GAO, should be put in place ignores the fact that both the House and the Senate (and by shared data, also the Library of Congress) already have a report logging system in place via LEGIS. This report logging system is available to all House offices having CRT terminal access to the MIN. LEGIS is also used to automatically print the Executive Communication (reports received) index to the

House Journal. In the future it will be used to produce a number of other reports, including the portion of the daily Congressional Record where such Executive Communications are listed following the daily motion of adjournment.

Suggestion #5 on page 4-5 indicates that the Clerk and the Secretary will be responsible for following up on reporting delinquencies. The Clerk will not, unless directed by the House, assume this responsibility.

Suggestion #6 implies that committees will inform the GAO as to the usefulness of the reports. This may be desirable, but in practice it is unrealistic and should not be expected to work effectively.

Page 4-6: We endorse the suggestion that a working group consisting of representatives from the Clerk and the Secretary as well as GAO develop guidelines for identifying reporting requirements with the stipulation that representatives of HIS and the Congressional Research Service/Library of Congress should be included.

The GAO study suggests that after identifying new reporting requirements as well as changes to existing requirements, the Clerk will transmit a list to GAO. It is our suggestion that any such list be made available either by giving GAO access to the Clerk/HIS on-line system, or that GAO be sent a periodic report on magnetic tape of the 'audit trail' portion of the on-line report tracking system. The audit trail in our system will provide interested parties with a history of additions, deletions, and changes to the data base.

We do not believe that the GAO data base should be used to produce

lists of 'reports due to committees'. If such lists are produced from a batch system they will be so outdated that they will be of no more use to a committee than the delinquent reports that GAO is trying to monitor. We believe that useful notification to committees can come only from an on-line system such as that being designed within the House.

Likewise, the transmittal of reporting requirements to agencies from the batch system will be too late to be of use in meeting current reporting requirements. We suggest that if it is necessary to notify agencies of reporting requirements, such notices should come from the Clerk's on-line system at the start of each session of Congress and that the system include an automated feature to alert not only committees but agencies throughout the year as new, changed and deleted reporting requirements are added to the data base.

Page 4-8: We strongly endorse the suggestion that agencies include a brief and precise statement of the requirement to which they are responding. Additionally, it would be useful if the full legal citation requiring the report were cited on the cover letter accompanying the report. We support any efforts that GAO may make in this area.

Page 4-9: We take exception to the proposal that the Clerk will inform GAO when individual reports have been received. The Clerk and FIS currently cooperate to enter exactly this type of data into the LEGIS data base. GAO should attempt to make provisions for accessing this data on-line or it may request periodic printed reports from

LEGIS, but this is the extent to which we consider it necessary to notify SAC. To do more would be redundant and fail to make use of existing automated capabilities.

The suggestion that the Clerk should follow up on delinquent reports was rejected by earlier reference, and we do so again in reference to its mention on page 4-9.

Page 4-12: We cannot agree with the suggestion that the Clerk will send executive summaries to all who have expressed interest in them. The reports submitted to Congress, as well as any cover letter or executive summary are sent directly to the committees and are the property of such committees. No portion of any such report will be further distributed by the Clerk, nor will the Clerk maintain an inventory of interested parties. The Clerk has in the past, and will in the future, refer all letters or calls for such information directly to the appropriate committee.

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