

DOCUMENT RESUME

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Letter to Sen. Edmund S. Muskie, Chairman, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs: Intergovernmental Relations Subcommittee; by Elmer B. Staats, Comptroller General.

Issue Area: Federal Records Management (1400).

Contact: Program Analysis Div.

Budget Function: General Government: Other General Government (806).

Organization Concerned: Congressional Budget Office; General Accounting Office.

Congressional Relevance: Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs: Intergovernmental Relations Subcommittee.

Authority: Sunset Act of 1977; S. 2 (95th Cong.). Congressional Budget Act of 1974, titles VII and VIII.



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

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B-170612

The Honorable Edmund S. Muskie
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Intergovernmental Relations
Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs

Dear Ed:

I understand that your subcommittee is considering amendments to S.2, the Sunset Act of 1977, and that these include a proposal to assign to the Congressional Budget Office the responsibility for developing an inventory of Federal programs. I strongly recommend against this change.

To carry out the responsibilities assigned to GAO by Titles VII and VIII of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, it was necessary for us to develop a data base identifying the programs for which information is required by the Congress. For the past two years, we have invested substantial resources in this development effort. While we have made a great deal of progress, the task is not yet finished. We believe we must finish this job if we are to meet the needs of Congress--particularly the needs of the authorizing committees--for program level information.

As I indicated in my recent testimony before your subcommittee, we believe that the inventory of Federal programs can be established in the relatively near future, building on the work which we have already done. Our work to date has required that we work closely not only with the authorizing committees but with the appropriation committees and the budget committees as well. Moreover, our staff has been in close consultation with the Congressional Budget Office throughout this effort.

The job has proven to be extraordinarily complex and difficult, more so than we anticipated when we started. At the same time, we must complete it if we are to carry out our

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general responsibilities under Titles VII and VIII, whether or not we are charged with producing an inventory of programs for purposes of S.2.

As we progress in our efforts to improve and complete the inventory in order to satisfy our other responsibilities, the inventory required for S.2 is being improved simultaneously. Requiring another support agency to develop a list at the same time would be needlessly duplicative and would delay the establishment of the initial inventory required to implement S.2.

In the course of the hearings and in discussion with members of your staff, we understand that there is concern about the potential large number of programs which might be contemplated by the GAO inventory, based on our work to date. Let me assure you that we believe we have no difference of opinion on this subject. In our testimony, we emphasized the importance of developing program packages or groups of related programs which would make it possible to review programs which interrelate with other programs in a logical and manageable basis. We believe that this can be done and we are anxious to work with you and members of your staff to this end. We have already initiated work in this area and hope to have a prototype set of program review packages for discussion by early summer.

Finally, the staff of our Program Analysis Division has drawn extensively on the knowledge of the auditing and evaluation staffs of the various divisions of GAO. In addition, the GAO has responsibility for the development of accounting and auditing principles and standards for the various agencies and, working with the agencies, to obtain the approval of the Comptroller General for their systems. It is important that these systems produce the information which will be required by the agencies which will mesh with the program packages used for S.2. That was part of the original logic which dictated the placement of the responsibility in GAO. There would be inevitable duplication and confusion if this function were to be placed elsewhere.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this matter if you wish.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Elmer

Comptroller General
of the United States

cc: Mr. Staats
Mr. Keller
Mr. Fitzgerald - OCR
Mr. Crowther - PAD
Mr. Hunter - PAD
Mr. Kardokus - PAD
Mr. Delfico - PAD

Mr. Havens - PAD

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