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

B-170612
B-202803

May 26, 1981

The Honorable Jack Brooks
Chairman, Committee on Government
  Operations
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter responds to separate requests for comments on
two bills--H.R. 1130 (B-170612), the "Sunset Program Reauthorization
and Evaluation Act of 1979" and H.R. 2547, the "Government Economy
and Spending Reform Act of 1981 (B-202803)." The two bills have
similar objectives and other characteristics that make a combined
response appropriate.

General Comments on H.R. 1130 and H.R. 2547

Both H.R. 1130 and H.R. 2547 closely resemble earlier
versions of sunset legislation considered in the 94th and 95th
Congresses. A later version of these bills called the Sunset
Act was considered in the 96th Congress as H.R. 2 and S. 2 and
has been reintroduced in the House of Representatives this year
as H.R. 2.

Each bill seeks a more systematic process for congressional
review and reauthorization of Government activities, an objective
that we have strongly supported in testimony before several con-
gressional committees during the last several Congresses. We
have summarized our testimony on oversight reform during the 96th
Congress in the enclosed report, "Observations on Oversight Reform."
Several critical elements should be part of any oversight reform
legislation, including:

--encouragement for the Congress, when authorizing new
   programs or reauthorizing existing ones, to state pro-
   gram objectives and expectations as clearly and specifi-
   cally as possible;

--coverage of as many types of Federal activities as
   possible, including self-financing activities and tax
   expenditures;

--flexible agenda setting and scheduling procedures that
   can balance the need to review all programs periodically
   against the need to balance committee workloads and review
   related programs at the same time;

[Comments on H.R. 1130 and H.R. 2547]

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--expansion of the number of programs subject to periodic
reauthorization; and

--creation of a program inventory to provide a substructure
for reviewing broad policies and individual programs and
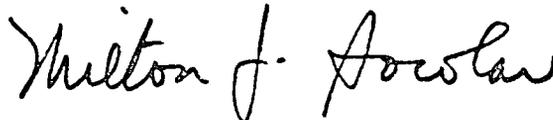activities.

These six elements, which are described more fully in the
enclosed report would provide a solid foundation for effective
oversight reform.   It is very important that oversight reform
focus on the development of simple, workable procedures that
will strengthen the review of Government programs without over-
loading the oversight and legislative capabilities of the Con-
gress.   We believe that H.R. 58, the Sunset Review Act of 1981,
contains an effective approach to oversight reform because it
emphasizes program review, rather than reauthorization or auto-
matic program termination.

Specific Comments on H.R. 1130

Some technical changes could be made in H.R. 1130 to
update deadlines established in an earlier version of the bill.
For example Section 201(c) requires the Comptroller General
to submit a program inventory to the Senate and the House of
Representatives by July 1, 1980.   We could work with your com-
mittee to establish a revised schedule for the program inventory,
if you so desire. Other dates that might need changing are con-
tained in Section 3(b); Section 101(a); Section 101(b)(4); Section
106(e); Section 201(h); Section 204; Section 206; Section 302(a);
Section 303(a); Section 304(a) and Section 306(b).   Also, the
name of the Act might be updated from the Sunset Program Reauthori-
zation and Evaluation Act of 1979.

Title IV of H.R. 1130 is very similar to H.R. 18, a bill
to establish a Commission on More Effective Government.   We
sent you our comments on that bill on March 3, 1981, but I want
to reemphasize that such a commission could help focus public
attention, discussion, analysis and support on the steps that
need to be taken to improve our ability to govern ourselves,
and to restore public confidence in all levels of government.

Sincerely yours,

Acting Comptroller General
of the United States

Enclosure

2