



126 123
31015

UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

ACCOUNTING AND FINANCIAL
MANAGEMENT DIVISION

B-115398

APRIL 1, 1985

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

The Honorable William V. Roth, Jr.
Chairman, Committee on Governmental
Affairs
United States Senate



126733

Subject: Recurring Reports to the Congress - Efforts
to Eliminate or Modify Certain Reporting
Requirements (GAO/AFMD-85-49)

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which conducted a survey of executive agencies in 1984 to identify unneeded executive reports to the Congress (Bulletin No. 84-10, March 28, 1984), found approximately 180 reporting requirements that generate reports to the Congress. OMB's effort is designed to achieve cost savings by eliminating or modifying those reporting requirements no longer needed for congressional oversight functions.

We share in the Administration's and the Congress' concern regarding unnecessary reports and the need to reduce paperwork in the government. We have several reporting requirements that we believe your Committees should include in the legislative proposals that result from this effort. Following are report titles, references to legislation requiring these reports, and recommendations and reasons for the elimination or modification of the reporting requirements.

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CONGRESS ON SHUT-IN AND FLARING OFFSHORE OIL
AND GAS WELLS

Section 15(1)(D) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1343) requires the secretary of the interior to report annually to the Congress on, among other things, offshore oil and gas wells located on federal leases, that have been suspended from production or are burning off natural gas. The report gives the reason why each well is shut down or burning off natural gas, and whether the secretary intends to start up production on a closed well or order a cessation to the burning.

(974815)

031826

Under section 601(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act Amendments of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1861), the secretary's annual report also is submitted to the Comptroller General. Within 6 months after the secretary's report is received, the Comptroller General is required, under section 601(b) of the 1978 Act, to review and evaluate the methodology used by the secretary in allowing wells to shut down or to flare natural gas, and submit his findings and recommendations to the Congress.

Recommendation

We recommend the Congress repeal section 601(b) of the 1978 Act to eliminate the requirement for the Comptroller General's review and evaluation. The original purpose for the secretary's report and our evaluation has been superseded by full decontrol of oil prices in 1981 and the current phaseout of controls over natural gas prices. We have issued several reports that recommend the elimination of our reporting requirement. (The latest report is GAO/RCED-85-10, Oct. 20, 1984.) We have also recommended the elimination of section 15(1)(D) and section 601(a) that require the secretary of the interior to report annually. Interior under its day-to-day management will continue to be responsible for monitoring offshore oil and gas well production. Thus, it can provide the Congress with the necessary information when required. Legislation eliminating Interior's annual reporting requirement was introduced in previous Congresses, and is being considered by OMB in its present effort.

ANNUAL REPORT ON ACTIVITIES OF THE MERIT SYSTEM PROTECTION BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT ON ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Under section 101(a) of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. 2304(b)), we must submit an annual report to the President and the Congress on significant actions of the Merit Systems Protection Board and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). The report also must analyze whether OPM's actions meet merit system principles and are free from prohibited personnel practices.

Recommendation

We recommend the Congress amend the Civil Service Reform Act to eliminate the requirement for our annual report. We have the authority to review and report on OPM and Merit Systems Protection Board activities under our general accounting and auditing authority, and we regularly exercise this authority and reporting responsibility. A separate annual report is unnecessary. By eliminating this requirement, we would have more flexibility in planning and scheduling work at these agencies and avoid possible duplication.

ANNUAL REPORT ON PROGRESS TO IMPROVE PROGRAM AND BUDGET
INFORMATION FOR CONGRESSIONAL USE

The Congressional Budget Act of 1974 (31 U.S.C. 1113(e)) has the following requirement:

"The Comptroller General shall submit to the Congress by September 1 of each year a report specifying the needs of the committees and Members of the Congress for fiscal, budgetary, and program-related information which have been identified by him. The report shall discuss the relationship of these needs to the existing reporting requirements; the extent to which the executive branch reporting presently meets the identified needs; the specification of changes to standard classifications needed to meet congressional needs; the activities, progress, and results of his activities with respect to assisting Congressional committees in developing their information needs and to monitoring the recurring reporting requirements of the Congress and its committees; and the progress that the executive branch has made during the past year in standardizing terminology, definitions, classifications, and codes."

Recommendation

We recommend the Congress amend this Act to eliminate our annual report on progress to improve program and budget information for the Congress. The amendment would dispense with a report that is no longer needed. In 1974 an annual report was considered necessary to monitor the Act's implementation. In the 11 years since the Act's passage, the basic institutional and procedural changes made by the Act have been implemented and the supporting information and reporting systems are fully operational. Furthermore, our periodic reports and testimony keep the Congress aware of progress made in improving budget and program information for its use.

REPORTING REQUIREMENT TO BE MODIFIED

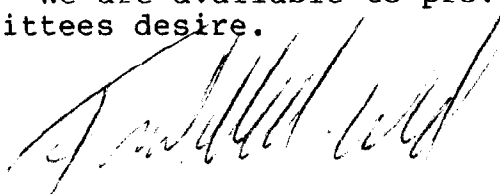
In addition to eliminating certain reporting requirements, we also request that the Congress modify our current audit authority at Amtrak contained in section 11 of the Amtrak Improvement Act of 1974. The law provides that "the Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct annually a performance audit of the activities and transactions of the Corporation (Amtrak) * * *" (45 U.S.C. 644(2)(A)) and the report of such audit be made to the Congress (45 U.S.C. 644(2)(C)). We would like the Act's current language to be revised to make the performance and audit report function discretionary instead of mandatory.

Recommendation

We recommend that section 11(1) of the Amtrak Improvement Act of 1974 (45 U.S.C. 644 (2)) be amended by (1) striking from paragraph (A) "The Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct annually a performance audit" and inserting in lieu thereof "The Comptroller General of the United States may conduct audits"; and (2) repealing paragraph (C).

We believe these amendments would give us more flexibility in planning and scheduling our work at Amtrak by eliminating the requirement that we audit and report at least once a year.

We believe these proposals will reduce paperwork and the reporting burden on federal agencies. We are sending a copy of this report to the Director of OMB. We are available to provide additional information if the Committees desire.



Frederick D. Wolf
Director