

III. CONGRESSIONAL DOCUMENTATION

A. Modern Records Survey

The Second Report of the Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress recommended that the Center for Legislative Archives conduct a systematic survey of modern House and Senate records to determine if the legislative process is adequately documented. The Center undertook the survey and reported its findings to the Advisory Committee in 1996. The survey covered the records of seven Senate and eight House committees, encompassing more than 50,000 boxes of records extending from the Ninetieth Congress (1967) to the 104th Congress (1996).

The Modern Records Survey confirmed that House and Senate committees are preserving and archiving recent records that, with some minor exceptions, document the work of Congress. The survey also revealed the extraordinary growth in the volume of records preserved, a trend which parallels the growing workload of Congress since World War II. For one Senate committee, for example, the average volume of records transferred per Congress has more than doubled in the last decade. While the House records from the first eighty congresses (1789–1948) comprise only about 15,000 cubic feet, the average transfer for each Congress during the past fifteen years has been 2,000 cubic feet per Congress. It is clear that House and Senate committees are preserving their records in larger quantities than ever before, documenting their greater activity in lawmaking and executive oversight as well as the growth in staff support in committees, subcommittees, and support agencies.

The survey also revealed trends in the management of legislative records that have archival implications. The increasing volume of staff files, often spanning multiple congresses, has resulted in greater quantities of substantive documentation being filed in a variety of subject files rather than in traditional series of committee records. The proliferation of subcommittees has also resulted in diminished reliance on a unified central filing system.

The Modern Records Survey also produced a series of recommendations to ensure proper records management practices. The Senate Historical Office incorporated these recommendations as part of its 1999 publication, *Records Management Handbook for United States Senate Committees*. To ensure the widest possible distribution to the target audience, the Senate Historical Office augmented that volume with a brochure for all committee staff members, "U.S. Senate Records: Guidelines for Committee Staff." The latter

includes a checklist of procedures for filing committee records and transferring them to the National Archives.

Similarly, the Legislative Resource Center incorporated the Center for Legislative Archives' suggestions in *Committee Records Guidelines* (formerly *Archiving Committee Records for Committees of the U.S. House of Representatives: A Handbook of Archival Practices and Procedures*). Today this publication is available to both House staff members and the public at large through the Clerk's web page (<http://clerkweb.house.gov>). Through this publication as well as workshops and briefings, the Legislative Resource Center has worked to maintain and raise the archival consciousness of committee clerks and associated staff members.

The Center plans to continue to update the Modern Records Survey in order to maintain intellectual control of recent accessions and to gauge trends in the records management practices of congressional committees.

B. Committee Guidance

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate encourage committees to improve records management through the issuance of management handbooks and pamphlets. In 1998, the House Legislative Resource Center first issued a *Committee Records Guide*, which is now also posted on the Clerk's web page and revised regularly. Together with this publication and ongoing briefings and workshops for committee staffs, the Legislative Resource Center has continued to promote better understanding of archival requirements. In 1999 the Senate Historical Office revised and reissued the *Records Management Handbook for United States Senate Committees* and sent copies to each committee chief clerk and subcommittee assistant clerks. A pamphlet highlighting Senate Rules and relevant statutes governing committee records was also prepared and distributed to all committee staff. Individual committee staff briefings are held regularly to review Senate record-keeping requirements. Archival processing assistance is provided to committees that are unable to process older noncurrent materials. In an effort to encourage appreciation of the historical collections at the Center for Legislative Archives, chief clerks are periodically invited to tour the Center and view some of the "documentary treasures" first hand. All of these efforts have helped to raise the "recordkeeping consciousness level" among committee staff. Because staff turnover is so rapid, such efforts must be undertaken on a regular basis. During 2000, two Senate committees hired professional archivists with immediate improvements in records management and preserva-

tion. Because the positive results were so evident, other committees should consider adding staff with archival training. In fact, the addition of such staff probably would be the single most effective action that committees could take to improve the quality of committee documentation.

C. Records of Party Conferences, Caucuses, Commissions, and Congressional Support Agencies

The Center has begun to acquire the records of party conferences and caucuses that have been sought for years. With the help of the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate, the Center now holds publications of the House Republican Caucus, 93rd–102nd Congress; records of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, 78th–104th Congress; Senate Republican Conference and Caucus, 62nd–89th Congress; Democratic Policy Committee, 84th–103rd Congress; and Senate Democratic Conference minutes, 1903–1964. The Senate Historical Office's publication of the Senate Republican Conference minutes, 1911–1964, and the Senate Democratic Conference minutes, 1903–1964, and their availability online through GPO Access have sparked an interest in these records among scholars and provide a vital entry point to research in the unpublished materials.

A complete set of party conference position papers, ballots, correspondence files, and committee assignment requests does not exist in any single repository because such materials have often been treated as members' personal papers or have remained in the custody of the conference or committee. The dispersal of these resources created a significant gap in the documentation of the legislative process. While the Center's holdings include House of Representatives' committee assignment requests for the period from 1911 to 1920, they contain few subsequent materials of this nature. In an effort to fill this documentary void, the Center provides what assistance it can to ensure the preservation of these records as well as those of congressional campaign committee records.

The Center works with the National Archives and Records Administration's Life Cycle Management Division to ensure that records of congressional commissions are preserved at the Center. The latest commission to transfer its records to the Center is the Commission on Military Training and Gender-Related Issues. Like legislative support agencies, congressional commissions are subject to the Federal Records Act, which requires that records be inventoried to determine which series are historically valuable and merit

permanent retention at the Center. The National Archives is scheduling the records of congressional commissions while they are still operational to ensure the proper disposition of the records before the commissions close their doors. Schedules have been written for the Advisory Commission on Electronic Commerce and the Commission on the Advancement of Federal Law Enforcement, both of which are scheduled to conclude their business during fiscal year 2000.

With the assistance of the Advisory Committee, the legislative support agencies have established records schedules to ensure the preservation of their permanently valuable records. The Center has received records from the Congressional Budget Office and the now defunct Office of Technology Assessment.