



**Statement of R. Eric Petersen
Specialist in American National Government
Congressional Research Service**

Hearing on

GPO – Issues and Challenges: How Will GPO Transition to the Future?

Before the

**Subcommittee on Oversight
Committee on House Administration**

House of Representatives

May 11, 2011

R. Eric Petersen¹
Specialist in American National Government, Congressional Research Service
GPO – Issues and Challenges: How Will GPO Transition to the Future?
Subcommittee on Oversight, Committee on House Administration
May 11, 2011

Chairman Gingrey, Ranking Member Lofgren, and Members of the subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

You have asked me to present testimony to the subcommittee on the Government Printing Office (GPO). In its 150 years, the agency's mission has evolved from pursuing a craft chiefly dedicated to the mass production of books, government forms, flyers, and other printed materials to its current posture as "the Federal Government's primary centralized resource for producing, procuring, cataloging, indexing, authenticating, disseminating, and preserving the official information products of the U.S. Government in digital and tangible forms."²

GPO's evolution reflects similar transformations in the printing, publishing, and information management components of the private sector. In the past four decades, those industries have addressed the emergence of electronic publishing and distribution. The advent of digital information has expanded the means of information creation, protection, and delivery beyond mechanical compilation and production of documents that exist only on paper. Where mass-produced printed products were the focus in the 19th and 20th Centuries, today GPO produces passports, identification documents for citizens enrolled in various government benefit programs, immigration documents, and secure credentials for the federal workforce. Individual copies are unique, products are customizable, and include advanced anti-counterfeiting features. Documents of general interest and mass distribution have changed as well – according to GPO, approximately 97% of all U.S. Government documents are "born digital," published electronically and available through the Internet, and will never be printed by the federal government. The legacy of the printing program continues as well, with paper copies of the *Congressional Record*, *Federal Register*, and other government publications available in dwindling numbers, but accessible without charge in electronic form to Internet users through GPO's Federal Digital System (FDsys).³

Some of the transitions seen in the past four decades have been the result of congressional mandates. The enactment of P.L. 103-40, the Government Printing Office Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act of 1993,⁴ required the production of electronic versions of the *Congressional Record* and the *Federal Register*, and provided authority for production and distribution of other government documents electronically. The act requires GPO to the "extent practicable, [to] accommodate any request by the head

¹ Jennifer Manning, Information Research Specialist; Congressional Research Service, provided research assistance.

² Government Printing Office, *GPO's Strategic Plan FY2011-2015*, Washington, DC, April 2011, unnumbered pages, http://www.gpo.gov/pdfs/about/2011_StrategicPlan.pdf.

³ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/home.action>.

⁴ P.L. 103-40, Government Printing Office Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act of 1993, 107 Stat. 112, 44 U.S.C. 4101.

of a department or agency to include ... information that is under the control of the department or agency involved” in its electronic directory and systems of online access.⁵

In 1994, GPO began producing electronic versions of the daily edition of the *Congressional Record* and the *Federal Register*. Soon after, GPO began providing access to electronic versions of executive branch and congressional documents authorized for distribution by Congress through its GPO Access website. In the Spring of 2009, the agency began distributing new documents through its Federal Digital System (FDsys), and migrating collections from GPO Access.⁶

As a consequence of electronic production and dissemination, some materials distributed by GPO are more readily available to wider congressional, other governmental, and public audiences than when they were produced and distributed only in paper form. Further, changes in the production process from the creation of content through delivery to a user, in print or electronic form, may have reduced the resources necessary to produce governmental information.⁷ For example, current law authorizes the production of as many as 23,000 copies of the daily edition of the *Congressional Record*. In practice, GPO produces approximately 3,500 copies.

In light of these changes, some have argued that eliminating more paper copies of some congressional and executive branch documents, notably the *Congressional Record*, measures introduced in Congress, and the *Federal Register*, and relying instead on electronic versions, could result in further cost and resource savings, and might provide environmental benefits. Some of the technological transformations GPO has adopted have also incorporated changes that may provide environmental benefits. Since at least 2000, GPO and its contractors have used paper that meets federal recycled paper requirements, and all GPO printing inks have been vegetable oil based instead of petroleum based. In 2009, then-Speaker of the House, Representative Nancy Pelosi, announced that the daily edition of the *Congressional Record* would be printed on 100% recycled paper.⁸ While some environmental benefits might result from changes in printing levels or the use of more sustainable materials, it is also possible that any of those benefits could be offset by resource demands that arise from investment in technologies and equipment that support the electronic distribution of government information, or the resources needed to operate them.

While resources have been dedicated to the development and distribution of digital information, current law regarding document production, authentication, and preservation, as well as some user demand, require a number of paper-based documents to be produced and distributed as part of the official record of governmental proceedings. As a result of requirements for both electronic and paper-based versions of governmental documents, GPO has for several years overseen an information collection, reproduction, and distribution process that produces and distributes most of the information for which it is responsible⁹ in both electronic and printed forms. This process provides the necessary information and appropriate

⁶ Information about the migration of materials from GPO Access to FDsys is available at <http://www.gpo.gov/projects/fdsysinfo.htm>.

⁷ Some of the changes include transition from mechanical to electronic means to create, compose, and prepare government documents; the use of recycled paper in printing; and reduced demand for paper-based printed products. Using these resources at reduced levels may constitute a savings, although it may be difficult to calculate the extent of those savings in monetary terms.

⁸ See U.S. Government Printing Office, *Annual Report, Fiscal Year 2000*, Washington, DC, 2001, p. 2, <http://www.gpo.gov/pdfs/congressional/archives/2000gpoannualreport.pdf>; and U.S. Congress, House, Speaker of the House, “Pelosi: Congressional Record Now Printed on 100 Percent Recycled Paper,” press release, October 2, 2009.

⁹ The congressional materials GPO produces include legislation, committee documents, handbooks, manuals, and the *Congressional Record*. GPO is not responsible for distributing all congressional information. Some examples of items for which GPO has no responsibility include various disclosure documents required by the House or Senate, and the correspondence, media releases, and records of individual Members.

formats for the United States Government to carry out and document its activities, but it may also result in some unwanted printed copies of some documents being delivered to users who prefer to access those resources electronically.

A number of initiatives, including legislative proposals and administrative activities in Congress and the executive branch, have been introduced to curb the extent of government printing. These include the following:

- On January 12, 2011, Representative Christopher J. Lee introduced H.R. 292, the Stop the OverPrinting (STOP) Act. As introduced, the measure would have amended Section 706 of Title 44 of the *United States Code* to “make bills and resolutions available for the use of the House of Representatives and Senate only in an electronic format which is accessible through the Internet,” with some exceptions. Those exceptions would have included requests by committees for up to 75 printed copies of measures within their jurisdiction, or as many copies of individual bills or resolutions as may be requested by Members or committees of Congress. The measure was amended in the House to require the Public Printer to make bills and resolutions available for the use of offices of Members of Congress only in an electronic format that is accessible through the Internet. The House, under suspension of the rules, passed H.R. 292 by a vote of 399 to zero. The measure was referred to the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration on January 25, 2011. No further action has been taken at the time of this testimony.
- On January 26, 2011, Senator Tom Coburn introduced S. 210, the Stop the OverPrinting (STOP) Act. The measure would require the Public Printer to make bills and resolutions available for the use of offices of Members of Congress only in an electronic format that is accessible through the Internet. S. 210 was referred to the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration on January 26, 2011. No further action has been taken at the time of this testimony.
- On March 30, 2011, Senator Coburn introduced S. 674, the Congressional Record Printing Savings Act of 2011. The measure would limit the number of copies of the *Congressional Record* that are authorized to be printed to the minimum number of copies that are necessary to be printed for archival purposes. S. 674 was referred to the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration on March 30, 2011. No further action has been taken at the time of this testimony.
- On April 15, 2011 Representative Candice Miller introduced H.R. 1626, the Prevent the Reckless, Irresponsible, Needless Typography (PRINT) Act of 2011. The measure would limit the number of copies of the *Congressional Record* that are authorized to be printed to the minimum number of copies that are necessary to be printed for archival purposes. H.R. 1626 was referred to the Committee on House Administration on April 15, 2011. No further action has been taken at the time of this testimony.
- In the House of Representatives, Representative Daniel E. Lungren, Chairman of the Committee on House Administration, and Chairman Gingrey issued a Dear Colleague letter on May 5, 2011, inviting Members of the House to opt out of receiving paper copies of the *Congressional Record*, *Federal Register* and related indexes, and the *Code of Federal Regulations*. They argue that foregoing printed copies of those documents affords a potential annual savings of \$2,939 per Member office.¹⁰

¹⁰ Dear Colleague Letter from Representative Daniel E. Lungren, Chairman, Committee on House Administration, and Representative Phil Gingrey, Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight, Committee on House Administration, “Reduce Wasteful (continued...)”

- The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has also proposed similar efforts aimed at reducing the number of copies of the *Federal Register*. Based on a cost cutting recommendation submitted through the Obama Administration's Securing Americans' Value and Efficiency (SAVE) Award, OMB has ordered departments and agencies of the federal executive branch to cancel all 4,700 subscriptions for print versions of the *Federal Register* by May 13, 2011. OMB states that the "recommendation is expected to save taxpayers \$4 million or more annually."¹¹

Potential Savings

The focus of all of the legislative and administrative initiatives described here is on the potential savings that could result from producing fewer paper copies. While some savings may result, it is not clear that they will necessarily be as extensive as various proponents claim. In addition, efforts to further reduce the number of paper copies may raise questions related to access to government materials for individuals and groups who do not have sufficient Internet access, as well as concerns about the capacity to archive the records of government, and to retrieve those materials in the future.

In the printing industry, between two-thirds and three-quarters of the cost of producing a printing job using offset lithography¹² is dedicated to activities that take place in the "prepress" phase before the first copy of the final product is printed. GPO generally follows printing industry standards related to the distribution of production costs. For example, in its FY2011 budget justification, the agency estimated that the cost of producing one page of the *Congressional Record* would cost \$782, with \$532 (68.03%) dedicated to prepress activities and \$250 (31.97%) covering the printing, finishing, and delivery of finished products. Most of the prepress processes¹³ must occur to produce the electronic version of governmental records in standard formats,¹⁴ so the opportunities for savings are minimal. GPO's estimate of printing includes the cost of the entire print run, approximately 3,500 copies for the daily edition. If press runs are further reduced,¹⁵ some limited savings could result. At the same time, however, since there is user demand, as well as archival concerns that require paper copies, discussed below, it is still necessary to produce paper copies. Many of the costs of the printing phase of production are fixed, and because of this, the opportunity to realize incremental savings by reducing the number of copies produced is limited by the extent of fixed costs to produce the number of required paper copies. As a consequence, after realizing whatever savings that may be available, further reducing the number of printed copies will have the effect of increasing the marginal cost of the copies produced.

(...continued)

Spending by Opting-out of Unnecessary Printing and Delivery of House Publications," May 5, 2011, <http://e-dearcolleague.house.gov/details.aspx?57242>.

¹¹ Jeffrey Zients, *Implementation of the SAVE Award in the President's FY 2012 Budget*, Office of Management and Budget, Memorandum to All Executive; Branch Departments and Agencies, M-11-18, Washington, DC, April 25, 2011, p. 1, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-18.pdf>.

¹² Offset printing is the technology and process used to produce the *Congressional Record*, *Federal Register*, and some legislation. Other technologies, such as digital printing, which GPO uses to fulfill some of its work, may have different cost structures and the discussion that follows may not fully apply to their use.

¹³ Prepress processes include processing raw information (in digital or analog forms) into standardized formats, proofreading, copyediting, preparation of images for reproduction, and transfer of those images to printing plates.

¹⁴ Some of the prepress costs, such as plate making, would be eliminated if printed copies were no longer produced. GPO does not provide detailed estimates of the costs of individual prepress processes, but it appears that the actual cost of prepress processes would be somewhat lower than the GPO estimate suggests.

¹⁵ The authorized number of copies of the daily edition of the *Congressional Record* is approximately 23,000 plus as many copies as are necessary to fulfill paid subscriptions. In 1985, approximately 27,100 copies of the daily edition were produced. The current level of 3,500 copies represents an 84% reduction over 1985 levels.

I have not evaluated the methods by which potential savings have been calculated in the preceding examples, and have no information about how the authors of those savings developed them. In numerous discussions, however, there is an assumption that reducing the number of copies printed of a government document will result in extensive savings. As long as the prepress process is essential to the creation of electronic documents, and even one printed copy is required, that assumption is questionable. Additional questions may arise when considering the potential increases to support electronic storage and delivery methods as demand for those resources increases.

Another concern related to the use of electronic documents is the cost of producing paper copies through decentralized resources. While electronic resources appear to be available in a manner in which they are nearly ubiquitous, they require devices such as desktop, laptop, or hand held computers to access information. Some of these options are hard to move where a user is working, some are hard to read; all of them pose challenges when a user wants to quickly make changes to a document or compare elements from several documents, or share documents with other users. As a consequence, a certain amount of user-initiated personal printing of electronic documents is to be expected.

Those copies, whether produced by the office laser printer, or through a copy center represent increased costs. Those costs may reduce or reverse any savings that might result from decreased levels of centralized printing from GPO because the costs per page of locally produced copies are much greater than the costs of GPO's printed copies. A 2009 study of federal employees' office printing habits by a company that provides information management solutions¹⁶ suggested that each federal employee prints 30 pages per workday, or 7,200 pages per year. Some of those copies are likely original materials that constitute the work product of that employee. But an unknown proportion is also likely to be copies of mass distribution government documents. Where copies produced by offset lithography cost less than \$0.02 per page, according to various estimates, the costs of copies from a copier or laser printer range from \$0.05 to \$0.50 per page. As a consequence, any reduction in lithographically printed items could yield apparent cost savings for GPO activities, but could yield substantial cost increases for office operations across Congress and the rest of the federal government. Any such changes would be all but untraceable, given the vast array of individual office and agency budgets, and variations of accounting methods, from which the costs would be incurred.

Other Issues

While much of the recent effort of government to respond to the transformation of the printing, publishing, and information management spheres has focused on the reduction of paper copies, there are reasons for which some argue that paper copies remain essential as a means of access to information in both the short and long terms. Short-term concerns focus on access to information by those who may not have access to means of electronic distribution. Longer-term concerns focus on the challenges related to archiving and permanent retention of information in electronic forms.

Access Concerns

In addition to the savings opportunities, one of the drivers that appear to be moving efforts to reduce paper copies of various government documents in Congress is the idea that electronic copies are readily available throughout Congress and the rest of the federal government. That may not be the case for users

¹⁶ Lexmark, *2009 Government Printing Report: A Closer Look at Costs, Habits, Policies, and Opportunities for Savings*, May 12, 2009.

outside of government. In various conversations, it has been reported to me that a number of facilities in the Federal Depository Library System continue to rely on paper copies in part because they do not have access to sufficient high-speed Internet connections to fulfill patrons' demands. If this is the case, and I have not had the opportunity to verify these claims, it raises potential issues of information inequities. At a time when information about the work of government is arguably more available to more people than has ever been the case previously, a reduction in the number of paper copies could reduce the transparency of government activities for some.

Archival Concerns

A final concern related to the reduction in printed copies is related to the long-term consequences for information access over long periods of time. One of the critical duties of government is to retain a record of its activities and decisions. For all of the widespread use of electronic technologies to create, collect, and distribute government information, to date there is no digital process that meets the archival standard of availability and retrievability for 100 years. The only two technologies that do meet this standard are paper and microfilm. Although there are statutory and regulatory requirements regarding the archiving of government information, reducing the number of printed copies may have implications for the capacity of the government to maintain a complete, enduring archival record of its activities.

Discussion

Today's hearing was called to consider how GPO will transition to the future; at this juncture the way forward is unclear. The agency appears to be at a crossroads, with obligations to continue to produce products in essentially the same manner as it has for 150 years (albeit with greater efficiency due to significant changes in technology and work flow), and at the same time engage newer responsibilities to manage an ongoing transition to an environment where information is collected, authenticated, reproduced and distributed through an ever growing variety of outlets. Some of the challenges facing the agency appear to include questions about what efficiencies might still be achieved in the short term, as well as a thorough consideration of how the agency might evolve over a longer term. While I will defer to Mr. Boorman on some of that discussion, I'd like to briefly discuss some of the challenges the agency and Congress may face as they consider new policy regarding the agency, since it appears that current statutory authorities and their interpretation may not reach the full spectrum of GPO's activities and capacities.

With the exception of the enactment of P.L. 103-40, the Government Printing Office Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act of 1993, Title 44 of the *United States Code*, which governs governmental printing and the activities of GPO, has not significantly changed since the late 1960s, just before the first inroads of the transition to electronic information occurred. As a consequence, the law makes reference to the employment of "journeymen printers, pressmen, and bookbinders,"¹⁷ but is silent on the corps of software engineers, data entry technicians, and website designers whose efforts support the distribution of much of the agency's work. The law also contains detailed requirements for distribution of paper copies of a variety of documents, including bills under consideration throughout the legislative process and other congressional materials,¹⁸ but little detail on the specifics of digital collection, retention or distribution. In addition, the current business model under which GPO operates is arguably over reliant on printing as a means of generating income, and there are no explicit provisions to

¹⁷ 44 U.S.C. 305.

¹⁸ 44 U.S.C. 701, 706, 713, 720, 721, and 728.

meet the costs of upgrading technological infrastructure upon which electronic distribution relies. This may raise questions about the capacity of GPO to address the challenges of government information collection and dissemination in an environment that developed after its authority to act was granted.

Finally, in the area of agency oversight and supervision, since Congress last enacted extensive authorities for GPO, the policy environment has shifted. Following the United States Supreme Court's decision in *INS v. Chadha*,¹⁹ and executive branch interpretations of the decision, the effectiveness of current statutory authorities exercised by the Joint Committee on Printing to oversee and supervise government-wide information policy is unclear. This might affect the ability of Congress to fully exercise its authorities to oversee executive branch printing practices.

In conclusion, the manner in which the Government Printing Office transitions to the future may rest in part in how some or all of these concerns are addressed.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify. I will be happy to address any questions you may have.

¹⁹ 462 U.S. 919 (1983).
