

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress (the Advisory Committee) was established under authority of Public Law 101-509 (November 5, 1990) in order to advise Congress and the archivist of the United States on the management and preservation of the records of Congress. As required by the law, the committee submitted its first report on December 31, 1991. That report outlined an ambitious program in five areas: preservation, electronic records, holdings development, reference, and public programs. The Advisory Committee takes the opportunity in this its second report to assess past projects and determine where efforts need to be directed during the next six years. Chaired alternately by the clerk of the House and the secretary of the Senate, the committee consists of these officials plus the archivist of the United States, the historians of the Senate and House, and appointees of House and Senate leadership. (The statute appears in Appendix B and biographical sketches of current committee members are found in Appendix C.)

Progress has been made most notably in the following activities: establishment of disposition agreements with the secretary of the Senate and clerk of the House; scheduling of legislative support agency records by the Legislative Support Agency Task Force; preservation of Senate Democratic Conference minutes; donation of records from legislative service organizations; creation of a Congressional Research Center at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); development of an oral history info-text system; production of two traveling exhibits and an educational document packet; creation of on-line versions of the guides to House and Senate holdings; and initiation of a committee history project. A detailed status report of projects outlined in the first report is included as Appendix A.

The Advisory Committee recommends increased attention to the following eight priorities for the next six years.

- Assess the informational and evidential value of congressional **committee records**
- Evaluate the archival impact of **technology** on congressional documentation

- Develop the National Archives' **Congressional Research Center**, as resources permit
- Ensure the **preservation** of congressional documentation in all record formats, including electronic and videotape
- Ensure the declassification review by the year 2000 of national security **classified information** in congressional committee records that are over twenty-five years old
- Create a **Congressional Research Service archive** to preserve and increase public access to the records of this legislative support service
- Add to the Advisory Committee an **appointee of the Librarian of Congress**
- Require **regular submission of an Advisory Committee report** every six years.

A Focus on Committee Records

Two factors greatly influence the informational value of committee records. The first is the degree to which committee members and staff comply with statute and standing rules by forwarding records to NARA. The second is the extent to which documentation actually is created in the high-technology and orally based legislative-political environment. At its first meeting in 1996, the Advisory Committee will consider establishing a task force to study the question of committee compliance and to appraise the informational content of recent transfers of committee records.

Technology's Impact on Archives

Technology issues for the archives of Congress can be broadly defined as "keeping up" and "keeping ahead." The first effort entails identifying and preserving electronic records currently generated by congressional offices, as well as using technology to publicize and provide better access to collections. The second task involves providing expert archival guidance on electronic records matters to congressional committee and member offices. The Advisory Committee will consider establishing a technology task force to prepare a research report on the archival implications of technology in Congress. This report would provide a basis for preservation recommendations and would review archival applications that are being developed at the Center for Legislative Archives, the National Digital Library, the House, the Senate, the support agencies, and other sites. Such a report would allow all parties interested in congressional documentation to coordinate plans

for use of the Internet, to coordinate development of congressional information sources, and to monitor new developments in handling members' papers, such as the HELIOS project developed at Carnegie Mellon University for the papers of the late Senator John Heinz.

Development of the Congressional Research Center

The Center for Legislative Archives has established a Congressional Research Center development statement in accordance with the plan submitted to the Advisory Committee and has undertaken several projects related to creating such a Center. The archivist of the United States should periodically provide status reports to the Advisory Committee that detail the Center's new projects and present a schedule for their implementation. Among other topics, these reports should address the impact that any planned renovations to the National Archives Building would have on reference service for Congress and the public. The continued development of the Congressional Research Center as NARA resources and researcher interest permit can provide the single greatest stimulus to building a broad collection of congressional documentation and to offering enhanced public access to congressional sources. The Committee will periodically review issues and needs in this area.

Enhance Preservation and Conservation of Records

Ensuring the preservation of the documentation of Congress remains a top priority of the Advisory Committee, as is demonstrated by its request for periodic reports on preservation projects in the Center for Legislative Archives and by its encouragement and support of preserving members' papers. The Committee will monitor all specific preservation activities regarding the official records of Congress and remains particularly concerned about long-term preservation of records in special media formats. In this regard, it will continue to review the preservation plans for electronic records and videotapes of floor proceedings.

Increase Access to Classified Information

Presidential Executive Order 12958, "Classified National Security Information," provides for the automatic declassification, in April 2000, of executive branch-created classified national security information that is over twenty-five years old, unless it has been reviewed and exempted under one of the several categories provid-

ed for in the order. Congressional committees should take advantage of declassification review specialists working at the National Archives to request that any executive branch national security classified information that exists in committee records also be reviewed. Work is underway to prepare an inventory of such national security classified records in committee records at the Center for Legislative Archives. The Advisory Committee will closely monitor the progress of declassification review, and it requests all necessary assistance from the Center for Legislative Archives in completing this task.

Create a Congressional Research Service Archive

Having substantially overseen the establishment of records programs in the congressional support agencies, the Advisory Committee will turn its attention to the records of the Congressional Research Service (CRS) with the goal of establishing a CRS archive. The committee believes that these records represent the single most important source of historical documentation that still remains outside of archival administrative control. This issue should receive the highest priority. The committee chair and vice chair have requested assistance from the Joint Committee on the Library to achieve this goal.

Add to the Committee an Appointee of the Librarian of Congress

Because much of the committee's work and interest involves technical areas where the Library of Congress has expertise and experience, the Librarian of Congress should name an appointee to this committee. Such an appointee could contribute, in particular, to deliberations regarding preservation, access, and outreach issues.

Reporting Schedule

The committee plans to submit its report once every six years, so that successive reports will be issued under chairmen of alternate houses. The next report will therefore be due in December 2001. The committee will prepare annual updates as appropriate.