

Office of Inspector General
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-9990

MEMORANDUM

TO: Robin H. Carle
Clerk of the House

FROM: John Lainhart IV 
Inspector General

DATE: July 18, 1995

SUBJECT: Audit Report - Opportunities Exist To Improve The Generation Of Legislative Information In The Office Of The Clerk (Report No. 95-CLK-13)

This is our final report on the Office of the Clerk of the House. The objective of the audit was to assess opportunities to improve efficiency and service delivery in Clerk operations. In this report, we identified problems associated with the operational practices of the Office of the Clerk and made recommendations for corrective actions.

In response to our June 14, 1995 draft report, your office generally concurred with our findings and recommendations. The June 30, 1995 formal management response provided by your office is incorporated in this final report and included in its entirety as an appendix. The corrective actions taken and planned by your office are appropriate and, when fully implemented, should adequately respond to the recommendations. In addition, we appreciate your comments on potential interpretation problems or inaccuracies in the report and have revised the text in this final report accordingly.

We appreciate your office's positive response and concurrence with the recommendations, and the courtesy and cooperation extended to us by your staff. If you have any questions or require additional information regarding this report, please call me or Craig W. Silverthorne at (202) 226-1250.

cc: Speaker of the House
Majority Leader of the House
Minority Leader of the House
Chairman, Committee on House Oversight
Ranking Minority Member, Committee on House Oversight
Members, Committee on House Oversight

OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO IMPROVE THE GENERATION OF LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION IN THE OFFICE OF THE CLERK

Report No. 95-CLK-13

July 18, 1995

RESULTS IN BRIEF

CONCLUSIONS

House of Representatives (House) bills were posted to the Internet prior to official approval. As a result, inaccurate and/or incomplete information could be disseminated to the public. This occurred because adequate policies and procedures were not established for dissemination of information.

The House Document Room did not effectively control the distribution and maintenance of documents. As a result, the House incurred additional costs in Calendar Year 1994 for the distribution and maintenance of paper documents. This occurred because management did not consider alternative methods of distributing and maintaining documents. Cost savings could be achieved if management took advantage of available electronic media and demand-based printing.

The Office of the Clerk did not effectively use electronic transfers of information to the Government Printing Office (GPO). As a result, the Office of the Clerk transfers about 75 percent of its legislative information to GPO in paper form creating considerable data re-entry costs and greater potential for data entry errors. This occurred because the Office of the Clerk did not have the capability to electronically transfer large volumes of data that adhere to GPO's printing requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Clerk: (1) develop a proposal, for approval by the Committee on House Oversight, to implement policies and procedures regarding information dissemination; (2) publicize availability of documents on Internet and evaluate the cost of printing documents on demand; and (3) improve the electronic interface between the Clerk's Office and GPO.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

In the June 30, 1995 response to our draft report, the Office of the Clerk generally concurred with the findings and recommendations in this report. According to the response, the Committee on House Oversight, on May 10, 1995, approved corrective actions proposed by the Clerk for the reorganization of the Clerk's offices to focus on electronic capabilities and information flow. In

furtherance of these goals, the Clerk discussed with the Committee on House Oversight issues regarding proper operation and procedures for the distribution of documents, and modified operating practices in the Document Room to encourage the use of alternative sources of official documents. Pending the arrival of Xerox DocuTech equipment and software, print-on-demand capabilities will be increased. Further, the Clerk promised to conduct a detailed office-by-office review and expects findings in early July 1995 on the technical needs and other operational suggestions. Thereafter, consultation and approval by the Committee on House Oversight will be obtained in order to implement the required changes.

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL COMMENTS

The Clerk's actions are responsive to the issues we identified and, when fully implemented, should satisfy the intent of our recommendations.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background

The duties of the Office of the Clerk include:

- Accepting the credentials of the Members-elect;
- Making the entries and journals of the proceedings of the House, including floor and Committee proceedings;
- Endorsing bills passed by the body;
- Reading the required papers in the House;
- Receiving messages from the President and from the Senate on behalf of the House;
- Distributing House and Senate documents to House staff and distributing House documents to the public;
- Serving as custodian of all House records and documents; and
- Maintaining the House voting machine.

The Office of the Clerk serves as the following:

- Originator and generator of all House legislative information; and
- Collector of other legislative information which originates from the Senate and White House.

Sub-offices of the Office of the Clerk support the legislative process as follows:

- **Office of Legislative Operations** receives and processes legislative information introduced in the House including: introduced bills and resolutions; House passed measures; and the daily House Journal.
- **Office of Legislative Computer Systems** manages the electronic flow of the Clerk's legislative information and serves as the liaison to House Information Resources (HIR).
- **Official Reporters to House Committees** arrange for stenographic reporting coverage of committee and subcommittee hearings, markups and meetings, and prepare committee activity reports for publication in the *Congressional Record* as it relates to the Daily Digest.

- **Office of Legislative Information (Legis)** is a computer-supported, centralized legislative status service for storing, retrieving, and disseminating information. Legis serves as the primary source for information on the status of legislation.
- **House Document Room** distributes House and Senate documents to House staff and House documents to the public.

HIS provides and supports the computer systems used by the Office of the Clerk to store and gather data. The information gathered by the Clerk is printed by the Government Printing Office (GPO) and distributed in the form of the *Congressional Record*, bills, amendments, resolutions, committee hearing transcripts, and the House Calendar. The *Congressional Record* documents the daily proceedings of the House and Senate. Figure 1 illustrates the daily process for producing and printing the *Record*.

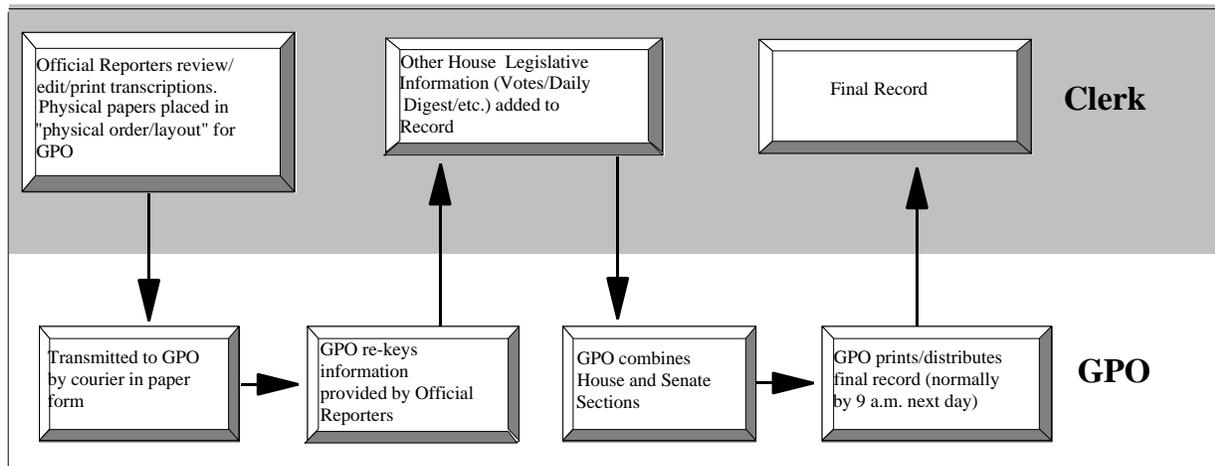


Figure 1 - 75 Percent of Legislative Information is Delivered to GPO in Hard Copy Form

Objectives, Scope, And Methodology

The objective of this audit was to evaluate the efficiency of information generation and dissemination by the Office of the Clerk. This review encompassed the period of October 1993 through April 1995. We conducted our audit work from March 1995 through May 1995. The issue of legislative information dissemination on the Internet that was implemented in the 104th Congress was also included in this review.

We conducted our review in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards*, issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. Our review included obtaining information from the Office of the Clerk, HIS, GPO, and the Joint Committee on Printing (JCP) through interviews, documentation reviews, and direct observation of the Legislative Information Management System (LIMS) and Internet products. The scope of the audit was defined in the Performance Audit Program as follows:

- Reviewed current process for transfer of data from the Office of the Clerk to HIS;
- Reviewed HIS process for creating user-accessible electronic copy; and
- Looked for opportunities to install controls over data integrity.

Internal Controls

We reviewed internal controls over information dissemination and generation. We found significant weaknesses in both areas as discussed in Finding A.

Prior Audit Coverage

No prior audits have been performed in this area.

II. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding A: Erroneous Information May Be Released On The Internet Due To The Lack Of Procedures For Dissemination

House bills were posted to the Internet prior to official approval. As a result, inaccurate and/or incomplete information could be disseminated to the public. This occurred because adequate policies and procedures were not established for dissemination of information.

According to the Rules of the House, the Office of the Clerk is responsible for preparing and documenting legislative information generated by the House. Information released to the public in printed or electronic form should be as accurately as possible represent a record of the House's legislative process.

At the start of the 104th Congress, HIS and the Library of Congress began disseminating legislative information on the Internet for public access. Members introduced bills into the record by placing them in a box located on the House floor referred to as the hopper. Bills can be removed or modified until they become official at the end of the day. The bill clerks enter the bill brief information into the LIMS system throughout the day and make any necessary modifications or deletions at the end of the day for final approval. This data includes only the bill number, bill title, sponsor and original co-sponsor, and committee referral. However, information is posted on the Internet every half hour, therefore, inaccurate and/or incomplete information could be disseminated to the public. Since recipients might place a significant amount of reliance on the legislative information, it must be accurate.

Bills were posted to the Internet before final approval because no policies were in place that define :

- Approval requirements for legislative information generated by the Clerk;
- Information that was to be disseminated on the Internet;
- Roles and responsibilities of the Clerk, HIS, and Library of Congress regarding the dissemination of legislative information; or
- The point in the preparation process that information was to be disseminated.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Clerk of the House develop a proposal, for approval by the Committee on House Oversight, to implement policies and procedures regarding information dissemination.

Management Response

In the June 30, 1995 response to our draft report, the Office of the Clerk generally concurred with this finding and recommendation (see Appendix). According to the response, a comprehensive review of electronic information creation and flow within the Office of the Clerk is currently underway. The Clerk further informed us that, on May 10, 1995, the Committee on House Oversight approved a reorganization of the Clerk's office to focus on enhancing electronic capabilities and information flow. The Clerk intends to create a centralized point to control releases and cross-check information to ensure accuracy.

Office of Inspector General Comments

The Clerk's actions are responsive to the issues we identified and, when fully implemented, should satisfy the intent of our recommendations.

Finding B: The House Document Room Did Not Utilize Technology To Lower Costs Of Distributing And Maintaining Documents

The House Document Room did not effectively control the distribution and maintenance of documents. As a result, the House incurred additional costs in Calendar Year (CY) 1994 for the distribution and maintenance of paper documents. This occurred because management did not consider alternative methods of distributing and maintaining documents. Cost savings could be achieved if management took advantage of available electronic media and demand-based printing.

The House Document Room is responsible for distributing House and Senate documents to Members and House staff and House documents to the public. It supplies legislative documents to the House Chamber and staffs a satellite document room in the Capitol when the House is in session. The Document Room stocks House and Senate bills, resolutions, reports, documents, and laws for Congress. GPO supplies all documents because the Document Room does not print or copy such documents. Specifically, in CY 1994, GPO sent the Document Room at least 500 copies of bills, public laws, and joint resolutions. Of those copies, 150 were forwarded to the Capitol and 350 were forwarded to the main Document Room location in House Annex II. When the Document Room needs more copies of a document, it orders them from GPO.

Generally, no limit was imposed on the number of copies that staff could order. A customer could order a document by a visit to the Document Room, telephone, fax, or mail. The Document Room met customer requests with paper documents at no charge. In addition, the Document Room did not systematically track the number of copies of each document distributed or in inventory. Documents were ordered based on experience and observation of the number of documents requested. The Document Room incurred \$822,000 of employee payroll and benefits cost in CY 1994 supporting these activities.

As a result, the House incurred additional costs in CY 1994 for the distribution of paper documents. Although information was not available to estimate savings, reduced paper volume would translate into the need for fewer employees in the Document Room. The House could reduce demand for paper documents by publicizing the availability of electronic media. Furthermore, the Document Room should utilize existing electronic media and demand-printing practices or processes that are available to the House. For example:

- House Bills and Resolutions are available on THOMAS and GPO ACCESS on the Internet.

- The Senate prints many of its documents on the docutext¹ printer in its Document Room.
- Private companies use electronic mail and bulletin boards to distribute documents.

In addition, management needs to alert the public to the availability of electronic media. For example, brightly colored instruction sheets can be placed on all requests fulfilled by the Document Room informing users that electronic media is available and how it can be obtained. Also, documents can be made available on computer diskette for a fee that would cover the costs of the diskette. Furthermore, printers could be installed in the Document Room to print on demand and the number of copies of each document delivered from GPO could be reduced.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Clerk of the House:

1. Publicize the availability of documents on Internet.
2. Evaluate the cost of printing documents on demand and, if cost-effective, prepare a proposal, for approval by the Committee on House Oversight, to install demand printers in the Document Room.

Management Response

In the June 30, 1995 response to our draft report, the Office of the Clerk generally concurred with this finding and recommendations (see Appendix). The Clerk informed us that, since the transfer of the House Document Room to the Office of the Clerk in April 1995, discussions have begun between their office and the Committee on House Oversight on proper operation and procedures regarding the distribution of documents. The goal is to fulfill the need to provide copies and/or access to the public, while reducing the costs of such distribution services. Accordingly, the Clerk has modified standard operating practices to require House Document Room personnel to direct the public to alternative sources of official documents (including electronic copies on the Internet) when public copies are no longer available for distribution. In addition, the Clerk is currently expecting delivery of Xerox DocuTech equipment, which will increase their ability to provide print-on-demand capabilities and reduce the number of copies being printed by GPO.

¹Docutext printers provide the ability for hard copies of information to be produced directly from electronic files.

Office of Inspector General Comments

The Clerk's actions are responsive to the issues we identified and, when fully implemented, should satisfy the intent of our recommendations.

Finding C: The Office Of The Clerk Did Not Effectively Use Electronic Transfers Of Information To GPO

The Office of the Clerk did not effectively use electronic transfers of information to GPO. As a result, the Office of the Clerk transferred about 75 percent of its legislative information to GPO in paper form creating considerable data re-entry costs and greater potential for data entry errors. This occurred because the Office of the Clerk did not have the capability to electronically transfer large volumes of data that adhere to GPO's printing requirements.

It is widely accepted, by both the Federal government and private industry, that electronic transfer of information saves time, money, and duplication of effort. Furthermore, electronic collection of information reduces the paperwork burden, reduces errors, facilitates validation, and provides increased convenience resulting in more timely receipt of information. The technology readily exists to transfer data electronically.

The Office of the Clerk did not ensure that information was transferred effectively to GPO. According to U.S. Code, Title 44, GPO must adhere to certain rules, such as arrangement, type, and style, when publishing Federal documents. However, because 75 percent of the information transferred to GPO was in paper form, the Office of the Clerk incurred costs for data entry, proof reading, and printing that could be avoided in the future with effective use of electronic transfers of information.

The JCP monitors GPO charges to the House. Cost detail was not provided that presented a breakdown of GPO's charges for services provided. Therefore, we were unable to compile the actual charges associated with manual data entry, scanning, and proof reading services. However, according to JCP staff, the rates charged by GPO were excessive for the services provided because the transfer of paper printouts resulted in a duplication of data entry effort and enhanced the potential for data entry errors. Also, significant costs were charged to the Office of the Clerk's account by GPO for data entry, proof reading, and document scanning services that were required by the Office of the Clerk's procedure for providing legislative information in hard copy format. However, the Office of the Clerk did not have the technical capability to electronically transfer large volumes of data which adhere to GPO's printing requirements.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Clerk of the House improve the electronic interface between the Clerk's office and GPO by working with House Information Resources² and GPO to establish a more comprehensive electronic data transfer capability.

Management Response

In the June 30, 1995 response to our draft report, the Office of the Clerk generally concurred with this finding and recommendation (see Appendix). According to the response, the Office of the Clerk has been involved in a comprehensive organizational and personnel restructuring since the beginning of the 104th Congress. Consequently, the Clerk recognizes the need to increase utilization of computer equipment and information management and standardization between offices and outside entities. A detailed office-by-office review is being conducted and specific findings are expected in early July 1995 on the technical needs and other operational suggestions. Thereafter, consultation and approval by the Committee on House Oversight will be obtained in order to implement the required changes.

Office of Inspector General Comments

The Clerk's actions are responsive to the issues we identified and, when fully implemented, should satisfy the intent of our recommendations.

²House Information Resources was formerly referred to as House Information Systems.

APPENDIX

Robin H. Carle
Clerk of the House

Response to Price Waterhouse Draft Audit Report Entitled:
"Establish and Enforce Policies to Improve the Clerk's
Generation of Legislative Information"

Finding and Recommendations

Finding A: Erroneous Information

Examples of the electronic public release of incomplete and potentially inaccurate information has been experienced over the last several months. It has been the position of the Clerk that this situation is unacceptable and should be better corrected and information flow better controlled. However, the Clerk has had no previous or current role in determining what information is publicly released or when such information is released to the public.

The Office of the Clerk is involved in the formulation, development and creation of House's official records and information. In this development, several other entities provide both technical and physical support, such as House Information Resources (formally House Information Services) and the Government Printing Office. Currently, these entities take information from the Clerk and provide it directly to the public. The Clerk has had basic understanding of their activities, but not been consulted to ensure the accuracy of the information being publicly released.

Currently, a comprehensive technical review of electronic information creation and flow within the Offices of the Clerk is underway. On May 10, 1995, the Committee on House Oversight unanimously approved a reorganization of the Clerk's offices that focused on enhancing electronic capabilities and information flow. It is the intention of the Clerk to create a centralized release point to control such releases and to cross-check information prior to release to ensure accuracy.

The Clerk will be continuing to work with the Committee on House Oversight and the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch as this project progresses.

OTHER ISSUES

While I am supportive of the general concepts included in this section of the Price Waterhouse overview, several inconsistencies and potential inaccuracies concern me. I am providing the following list:

1. Pages 1-2, Descriptions of sub-offices are incomplete and inaccurate in certain cases;
2. Page 2, last paragraph, statement regarding the Clerk's request for this report. While this issue has been a concern to my office, no official request was made by my office for this report. Instead, I believe, the issues arose as a result of a differing review of House Information Resources and a determination was made by Price Waterhouse to issue a separate report.
3. Page 4, third paragraph, description of Official Reporters as entering bills into LIMS is inaccurate. The procedure requires that the Bill Clerks (as part of the Office of Legislative Operations) enter bill brief information into LIMS. This data includes only the bill number (as assigned by the Clerk), bill title, sponsor and original cosponsors, and committee referral. The complete text of the bill is not currently provided to LIMS by any component of the Office of the Clerk.

Finding B: House Document Room

Clerk's Overview of the House Document Room

The House Document Room, until the beginning of the 104th Congress on January 4, 1995, was operated under the direction of the Doorkeeper. At the beginning of the 104th Congress authority for the office was transferred to the Chief Administrative Officer and in late April was again transferred to the Clerk of the House. When the Committee on House Oversight transferred the office to the Clerk, it was done with the intention to improve information creation and flow.

Upon transfer of the office to the Clerk, discussions between the Committee on House Oversight and the Clerk's office were begun on the proper operation and procedures regarding the distribution of documents. It had been the previous policy to provide unlimited

copies of documents free of charge to all requesters with little regard to cost. It has been the Clerk's intention to fulfill the need to provide copies and/or access to the public, while reducing the costs of such distribution services.

Recommendation #1

Already standard operating practices have been modified by the Clerk to require House Document Room personnel to direct the public to alternative sources of official documents (including electronic copies on the Internet) when public copies are no longer available for distribution. It is the Clerk's intention to ensure public access, while reducing overall costs.

Recommendation #2

During the 103d Congress, a Xerox DocuTech was purchased by the Clerk of the House. The installation of this equipment was intended to allow for print-on-demand capabilities for the Offices of the Clerk. At that time the Document Room was not part of the Clerk's offices and its transfer was being contemplated.

Throughout the 104th Congress, it has been my recommendation to place the Document Room under the Clerk of the House to utilize this equipment to reduce the number of copies being printed by the Government Printing Office and reduce storage and disposal issues facing the Document Room. Past experience has shown that a significant number of printed documents are created, stored and never used.

At this time, the arrival of additional DocuTech equipment and software is pending. It will increase our capability to move toward print-on-demand of House bills and reports. In addition, issues regarding the final location of the machinery and consolidation of office space is pending before the House Building Commission. It is my hope that these can be resolved and the DocuTech be fully functioning in the next few months.

OTHER ISSUES:

While I am supportive of the general concepts included in this section of the Price Waterhouse overview, I believe the numbers highlighted (Pg 5, paragraph 2) regarding the numbers of GPO prints provided to the House Document Room are inaccurate.

Finding C: Utilization of Electronic Transfer

Since the beginning of the 104th Congress, the Offices of the Clerk has been involved in a comprehensive personnel and organizational restructuring. Central to these reforms has been the need to increase the utilization of computer equipment, information management and standardization between offices and outside entities. On May 10, 1995, the Committee on House Oversight unanimously approved the proposal and its implementation is underway.

A detailed office-by-office review is being conducted and specific findings are expected in early July on the technical needs and other operational suggestions. Upon consultation and approval of the Committee on House Oversight, I anticipate the implementation of these changes.