

September 2, 1999

Michael DiMario
Public Printer of the United States
United States Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20401

Dear Mike:

In response to a telephone request from Fran Buckley, members of the Depository Library Council have discussed the press release that Secretary of Commerce Daley issued on August 8 proposing the dissolution of the National Technical Information Service (NTIS). Realizing that time is short for initial action, Council encourages GPO to take an active role in deliberations regarding the Department of Commerce proposal and the future of the NTIS collections and services.

Council's rationale for this is that Secretary Daley's proposal does not appear to be based on a very thorough analysis of what might be the most effective means for carrying out essential NTIS functions. NTIS collects, archives and sells scientific, technical, engineering and related business information created by or for the government. Council believes that any proposal to reorganize or eliminate NTIS be done in a manner which improves public access to these important materials and preserves the indexing, dissemination and archival functions that NTIS has provided.

The best solution may involve retooling NTIS, within the Department of Commerce or in another agency, or distributing appropriate functions to federal agencies that already perform similar functions, such as the GPO, National Archives and Records Administration, or the Library of Congress. In either case, Council believes that NTIS' indexing, distribution, and archival services are inherently government functions which should be ensured through legislation and supported, as needed, by appropriated funds as well as by the sale of products and services.

Furthermore, Council believes that GPO should be involved in these deliberations because:

GPO is one of several federal agencies involved in information services similar to those of NTIS, and therefore will be a knowledgeable participant in any discussion about the future of NTIS.

GPO has an obligation to ensure that federal government publications are available to the public at no cost through the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP).

Many federal publications currently distributed through NTIS are appropriate for FDLP distribution, as acknowledged in the recent establishment of the NTIS/GPO pilot project.

GPO, through its Electronic Collection and GPO Access Internet services, is a major federal player for providing online services similar to NTIS' FedWorld, providing essential support for agencies and dissemination to the public;

GPO is actively involved in discussions with other federal agencies including NARA and the Department of Agriculture -- which focus on the archiving of electronic resources. This is a significant factor given Secretary Daley's suggestion that agencies should post more information to the Web and the library community's concerns about the permanent public

access of agency web-based publications.

Several points which Council urges GPO to emphasize in deliberations regarding the possible disbanding of NTIS include:

That federal government publications made available exclusively through NTIS should also be available through the FDLP, as acknowledged in the recent establishment of the NTIS/GPO pilot project.

That agencies involved in the dissemination of information are generally focused on meeting the needs of that agency's current users, and have relied on NTIS, the FDLP, NARA, and select other agencies to index, archive, and preserve agency information. These functions are critically important and must be preserved even in a decentralized Web environment.

That mechanisms should be developed to assist agencies in fulfilling their information obligations to NTIS, the FDLP, and NARA, including the need to index and archive agency information, and to ensure agency compliance.

That the reorganization or elimination of NTIS might reduce redundancy in federal information services.

That dissemination of agency information in the new distributed Internet environment poses new information management challenges as well as opportunities. Before the federal government disbands an information management agency such as NTIS in favor of individual agency dissemination via the Internet, an analysis should be conducted to ensure that the Government's responsibility for indexing and archiving digital publications will be ensured.

That the future of the NTIS "legacy" collection of microfiche and paper is of significant concern to libraries and researchers, because those documents were not distributed to federal depository libraries and thus are not available throughout the country, as FDLP materials are.

Finally, as government information specialists we certainly hope that whatever discussions ensue from Secretary Daley's proposal improve public access to federal government information through the FDLP. Please let us know if you would like any further input on this issue.

Sincerely,

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cc: fran buckley, gil baldwin