



Statement of James H. Billington
The Librarian of Congress
before the
Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
United States Senate

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Library of Congress perspective as the Subcommittee reviews the proposal by the Department of Commerce to terminate the National Technical Information Service [NTIS]. In its initial August press release and subsequent bill drafts concerning the closing of NTIS, the Department of Commerce proposes transferring NTIS paper, microfiche and digital archives and bibliographic databases to the Library of Congress, to be maintained and made accessible to the public. The Subcommittee has provided to the Library draft legislation intended to accomplish the termination of NTIS and the transfer of various collections and functions out of the Department of Commerce, which the Library is in the process of evaluating to determine the legislation's impact on the Library's mission and existing programs.

While discussions of this matter have been necessitated by the actions of the Department of Commerce, now is perhaps an opportune time also to address pressing and important new challenges in information collection, dissemination, and archiving that face the federal government as a whole. The Library of Congress is eager to participate in an examination of federal information policy and to assist in determining the ultimate disposition of the collections and functions of NTIS.

Department of Commerce statements correctly point out that the Library has sizeable holdings in the area of science and technology. Our collections in this area date back to the Congress' purchase of Thomas Jefferson's personal library in 1815, after the original Library of Congress was burned by the British army. The library that Jefferson sold to the Congress not only included over twice the number of volumes in the Congress' earlier library; it expanded the scope of the Library far beyond the bounds of the destroyed books that had been devoted primarily to legal, economic, and historical works. Jefferson's books were in French, Spanish, German, Latin, Greek and Russian and the new Library of Congress covered such subjects as architecture, agriculture, chemistry, zoology, technical arts, and geography. This was the basis for the Library's universal collection of today – along with the transfer of the Smithsonian Institution library in 1866 to the Library of Congress of about 40,000 volumes of publications of

learned scientific societies, museums, exploring expeditions, and observatories throughout the world. This transfer, known as the Smithsonian Deposit, considerably broadened the range of the Library's science collections and permanently influenced their further development.

Over the next century, the Library greatly expanded its scientific collections, both domestic and foreign. This expansion was primarily attributable to intelligence gathering in wartime, copyright deposit and a vast increase in foreign exchanges and overseas acquisitions offices (which today provide acquisitions for the nation's premier research libraries as well for the Library's own collections). In 1963, the Library, at the urging of, and with funding from, the National Science Foundation, began to operate a National Referral Center for Science and Technology. Over time, referral services for scientific information were integrated into the Science, Technology and Business Division.

The Science, Technology and Business Division provides reference and bibliographic services and develops the collections in all areas of science and technology (with the exception of clinical medicine and technical agriculture, which are subject specialties of the National Library of Medicine and the National Agricultural Library respectively) and in business, management and economics. The scientific, business and technical materials in the Library's book and journal collection for which the Division has collection development responsibility comprise about eight million items – roughly 40 percent of the Library's total book and journal collection. In addition, the Division maintains, services, and develops its own specialized collections of technical reports, standards and international “gray literature” (i.e., non-classified, unpublished material often available only through specialized channels), amounting to 3.7 million items.

On several occasions – particularly during the early 1990's, with the advent of mass public use of the Internet – the Library has explored enhancing general access to scientific and technical information through development of specialized reference databases, making “gray literature” available electronically, and taking on a leading role in the national discussions of this topic. These exploratory activities have involved assessment of other federal agencies' collections and services, as well as collaboration with academic and commercial interests in assessing the respective roles of government and the private sector. During the Reagan Administration's discussions relating to privatization of NTIS, then-Secretary of Commerce Mosbacher and I conducted preliminary but inconclusive discussions about having the Library of Congress become the archival center for NTIS documents. The idea seems to have been revived to some degree in the Commerce Department's stated proposal for transferring NTIS' collections to the Library.

Editorials and commentaries on NTIS's imminent demise seem to accept the conclusion that electronic access to, and agency-based rather than centralized dissemination of, scientific and technical information have rendered an NTIS-type operation obsolete. Librarians and business and academic researchers are not so likely to concur with this conclusion. In many ways, the growth of electronic access and automated databases have greatly expanded the demand for reference services that are integrated with document delivery, such as the services provided by NTIS, as well as those provided by the private sector information industry. The question of how optimally to meet those demands in a rapidly changing information environment is now squarely before this subcommittee.

As the Subcommittee explores the best way to proceed, I hope you will consider, by their component parts, the full spectrum of operations involved in collecting, organizing and supplying scientific and technical information. NTIS provides or acquires a wide array of services, including publication, acquisition, indexing, abstracting, translation, digitization, distribution, and archiving of information from many sources and in several formats. NTIS not only provides centralized access to scientific and technical *U.S. government* information, but it also acquires these types of materials from *non-government* and *foreign sources* and provides reference and distribution services for these as well. These functions dovetail with activities carried out by the Commerce Department, the Library of Congress, and many other federal agencies in assisting the nation's academic and commercial entities to capitalize on research and development of the United States and the world, and to push innovation to the next level.

The assertion that some of NTIS' functions cannot be sustained on a cost-recovery basis does not necessarily mean that all or even most of its functions should be discontinued. If NTIS cannot continue in its present form, the federal government must examine which of its functions are sufficiently desirable and effective to merit continued federal support, and how and where such functions can best be sustained to ensure the uninterrupted acquisition, accessibility and preservation of scientific and technical information. Each function now carried out by NTIS should be assessed as to whether the function is needed, whether it should be centralized (or centrally coordinated); whether multiple access points, public and private, should be encouraged; and whether the function should be self-sustaining or publicly supported in order to serve a larger public good. Only then can a responsible conclusion be reached as to which agency or agencies are best positioned to ensure future access to information in all formats, even to some low-demand but potentially important products.

The Library of Congress can lend substantial expertise to this assessment, and may, given adequate resources, be a logical successor to NTIS for those functions that complement the Library's mission – particularly collecting, cataloging, and providing congressional, research and public access to scientific and technical material that is of policy-making or historical value or may not be easily found anywhere else. However, these functions, as the Department of Commerce has pointed out, are costly and, in large part, cannot realistically be recouped through a fee-based sales program. Moreover, the Library lacks the authority (and a proper business mechanism such as a revolving fund) to retain fees from such a sales program.

However, many of NTIS' functions (including proactive information retrieval activities, high volume document distribution, translation of foreign materials, abstracting scientific and technical reports, declassifying government information, brokering agency databases to the information industry, and print and electronic publication of information products of executive agencies) are beyond both the Library's current mandate and available resources. Several functions alluded to in the most recent available draft of the Department of Commerce's legislative proposal, such as being involved in determining a "compatible electronic format" for future supplies of executive branch STE information, raise separation of powers issues, as well as practical issues that Congress has struggled to address in the larger context of public access to federal information.

The Library has submitted written questions to the Department of Commerce to elicit information regarding the resources necessary to fulfill the functions that Commerce proposes to transfer legislatively to the Library. This information will be necessary for the Library – and the Congress – to assess the Library’s ability to carry out new functions that fall within our mission without impairing our current programs and services. I have attached for the Subcommittee’s information the specific questions posed to the Department of Commerce [Attachment A]. We understand that responses to the questions will be provided shortly before the hearing; as soon as the Library receives them, we will share them with the Subcommittee.

Mr. Chairman, I commend you and the members of this Subcommittee for convening this hearing. The matter immediately before this Subcommittee, NTIS, is one part of a larger government wide concern. The resolution of this matter will have a bearing on federal information policy generally. The Library continues discussions with National Archives, the Government Printing Office, the library community and other stakeholders about this proposal as it relates to the collection, dissemination and archiving of government information generally. These functions, whether carried out by NTIS or elsewhere, arguably should be considered to be component parts of a cost-effective federal investment in research and development – a goal this Subcommittee has worked toward during this session.

In his sixth annual message as president, Thomas Jefferson stated that “a public institution alone can supply those sciences which, though rarely called for, are yet necessary to complete the circle, all the parts of which contribute to the improvement of the country.” The Library of Congress is one public institution that looks forward to continuing to work with the Congress to ensure the circle is complete.



ATTACHMENT A

Questions Raised by 9/30/99 Draft Legislation
Sent to Department of Commerce 10/7/99

1. Transfer of Collections to Library

- Does the term “ scientific, technical, or engineering information” as defined in section 3 (e), fully encompass the 3-plus million item collection to be transferred to the Library of Congress, including foreign materials and gray literature?
- The draft appears to place the burden on the Library, once it receives the collection, to comply with the Federal Records Act of 1950 [section 102 (b)]. The National Archives and Records Administration has examined the collection since the Department of Commerce’s announcement of the closing of NTIS. What is the assessment of the quantity and nature of the records that are required by law to be transferred to NARA?
- What are the current space requirements for the collection (sq. ft.)?
- What is the current level of bibliographic control of the collection, particularly of the older items (over 5 years old)? Is the current cataloging information compatible with LC cataloging?
- Please provide a breakdown of the formats of items in the collection (paper, fiche,digital other) and the size of the bibliographic and other databases.

2. Resources Needed to maintain the collection

- Please provide a breakdown of NTIS personnel (or other Department of Commerce or contract personnel), by GS-level, responsible for the following NTIS activities:
 - acquisition (including collections policy development)
 - cataloging
 - abstracting and indexing
 - translating
 - storage, archiving and preservation (including re-formatting)

–database and IT management

- What is the volume of new items coming into the collection per year, in what formats? What is the annual volume of cataloging, abstracting, and indexing performed? What proportion of new acquisitions have not been digitized?

3. Other Functions and Responsibilities

- What is “full availability and continued improvement” intended to mean, precisely [sec. 201(a)]?
- Title 3 is silent with respect to agencies’ obligations under Title 44. How is this intended to affect those obligations?
- What recourse would the Library have if an agency did not comply with sec.201 (b)? How would the Library know whether an agency had failed to provide the information? Does NTIS provide staff resources for the purpose of tracking down “fugitive” documents?
- Describe the number and types of inter-agency agreements NTIS has currently to ensure receipt of new government and unpublished information and contract research reports.

4. General issue:

- The draft legislation includes the finding that “The Library of Congress is “uniquely suited to serve as a central point of access” to government information. What factors have gone into the implied conclusion that the Government Printing Office is not so suited?