
The People's Printer: Time for a Reawakening

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With Jeff Musto

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Introduction

“Ink-on-paper today is still the most egalitarian of information formats. It is accessible, transportable, and economical. The increased dissemination of Government information in electronic formats should indeed be pursued. ...But at this time electronic technologies must be utilized in addition to, not in place of, proven systems of Government information reproduction and dissemination, and protections must be provided for those who do not have access to computers and the other technologies necessary to make electronic access meaningful. For if we are not careful about maintaining policies to provide for the efficient and equitable access of all citizens to Government information, we run the risk of turning into a Nation of information-haves and information have-nots: a Nation of information elites, equipped with technology, and a Nation of the information-dispossessed, shut out by technology from access to critical information by and about Government that is essential to life in the United States today.”ⁱ

This prescient quote comes from the former head of the Government Printing Office, Public Printer Michael F. DiMario’s 1997 testimony before Congress. It is now 15 years later and access to computers, the internet, and other digital technologies have proliferated throughout American life; and with them the free flow of information. With the advent of these remarkable technologies, we have entered what many call an “information age” in which millions of people throughout the world have benefited from unprecedented access to and dissemination of information. This “information age” has helped to foster innovation, connected people in distant parts of the world, and has even been credited with playing a significant role in the recent “Arab Spring.”

Despite these advancements, elements of Mr. DiMario’s warning remain just as true today as they were in 1997. Millions of individuals remain without access to a computer, not to mention the internet. Those who do have access to the internet must worry about the credibility and reliability of the information they find there. Not to mention that the shift toward digitization brings about its own challenges regarding document preservation, integrity, and the continuing utility of the print medium.

As we shift toward a digital age we must remain mindful of these challenges and seek a balance that, on the one hand, promotes the digital dissemination of information, but that preserves the value and understands the importance of the print medium on the other.

The Government Printing Office (GPO), is responsible for the printing of the U.S. government's documents and for the dissemination of this information to an informed public. In this position, the GPO has an important role to play in balancing these sometimes competing goals.

The GPO has been grappling with many of the issues brought about by the digital age for well over a decade now. Unfortunately, as the government has shifted toward greater and greater digital and online operations, the GPO has been left with competing objectives: In an era of focused on budget deficits and austerity measures, the GPO faces pressure to keep its costs down, but it also strives to maintain a high level of public access to government information. The GPO strives to make an increasing amount of government documents and information readily available online, but as it pursues this goal, the quality and accessibility of its sales program and physically printed documents have deteriorated; leaving those members of the public who don't have access to the internet in the dark. Cost cutting measures have forced tough decisions about which documents are important enough to be printed or only made accessible online.

Turning back the clock for a moment, in 1979 a predecessor of ours, Shawn P. Kelly, wrote a report for the public on the practices of the GPO. Kelly's introduction to government printing in the late 1970's suggested that "GPO has something for everyone's interest, no matter how specialized or unusual,"ⁱⁱ and for the most part, this remains true today. However, changing times and changing technologies have drastically altered the dissemination of this material. Kelly made note of several publications of the day that were available through print media, and in my research for this report I have made attempts to find these publications' descendents. Whereas, the 1979 GPO boasted the printing of *Infant Care*, a pamphlet for new parents, today's GPO holds in its collections a similar list of safety precautions for parents and child-care providers: "Childcare.pdf."ⁱⁱⁱ The GPO of 1979's publication "Adult Physical Fitness," is now *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans: Be Active Your Way: A Fact Sheet for Adults*: listed digitally as "fs_adult.pdf."^{iv} Seeing a pattern here?

As Americans have become more and more computer savvy over the past two decades, the GPO has joined the E-Gov initiative and isn't slowing down. The GPO provides free online access to nearly 680,000 documents and publications.^v Many available in only an electronic format, the Government Printing Office is trying to stay ahead of the curve to prove its competence and worth in a digitized America where private print media outlets are shrinking or

falling by the wayside. Many have lauded the GPO's efforts as necessary and innovative, increasing both access and transparency in a time when citizens are demanding clear, truthful information at the push of a button. However, with such an emphasis on newer, faster technological pathways and processes, few have taken pause to examine whether the shift toward new alternatives to print media are harming the GPO's ability to keep the public informed.

The Government Printing Office provides two basic services to customers. First, it handles printing from Congress, the executive agencies, and the judiciary. A one stop shop for government printing, the GPO has been the official printer of government publications since 1861, and as a result, the largest printer in the nation. However, in this role, the GPO has recently cut its own involvement by gradually increasing its use of private printers. Whereas, originally the GPO would print much of what the Government needed on its own machinery, today the GPO increasingly outsources print jobs to private industry. With a budget of nearly one billion dollars^{vi} at its disposal, this raises valid questions about cost effectiveness and best practices, but also deeper questions related to the GPO's core mission.

The second role the GPO provides is, as its slogan suggests, "Keeping America Informed." In order to accomplish this, the GPO has been moving to a largely online, digital format. Citizens now have free online access to a multitude of government documents and publications. However, this change has its drawbacks. Once an avenue for citizens to gain access to printing of Government Publications at relatively low cost, it has now become difficult to obtain many items in print. The GPO has rapidly increased access to those who use the internet regularly, with online publication of many new government documents, and an online archiving system that will attempt to digitize earlier government publications. However, for those without access to the internet, including the poor and the elderly, this new digitization is leaving these constituents without adequate access to government documents.

Another concern related to GPO practices can be seen in an online search for Shawn Kelly's archetypal publications from 1979. As I scour all that GPO has to offer, I am remiss at finding but one of Kelly's examples available for the public. Kelly noted "for the farmer there is the "[1979] Agricultural Yearbook," and today a simple online search of the U.S. Government Bookstore inventory gave me the following, "Search Results for "Agricultural Yearbook"...yielded no results" let alone one from that specific year. The same search error appeared with searches for previous publications such as "Infant Care," "Your Child from One to Six," and "Your Child from Six to Twelve" that

Kelly noted were in great demand by young parents. Although some of these publications are far from being important historical documents, they are still a piece of our cumulative human knowledge. Even though we cannot be certain of the proverbial cause of death of each of these publications of the past, there is proof of other government printings dying an unnatural death due to GPO document destruction policies. One of the most egregious of these destructions was the shredding of thousands of copies of the Watergate Prosecutors' Report in the 1970's.

Government printing practices have come a long way since the creation of the GPO. At times mired in antiquity and at others surprisingly ahead of the pack, the Government Printing Office has proven itself to be flexible yet unmoving, innovative yet unimaginative. There are certainly areas in which the GPO deserves praise; yet, this praise does not come without reservation. Their recent electronic publication practices have increased access to government publications for millions of Americans, while leaving millions of others in the dark due to sharply rising prices for these publications' print brethren. Although the Government Printing Office has made great strides in the past decade and truly has achieved great things, its practices have sometimes fallen short of realizing their goal of "keeping America informed."

The purpose of this report is to examine current GPO practices and examine their value in today's democracy. It will start with a brief history of the Government Printing Office's role as "the public printer," since one cannot fully understand the importance and role of the GPO in American society and governance without a basic understanding of its past. Next, we will discuss the current practices of the GPO that include both printing for the purposes of daily government operations and printing for the public's benefit. We will fully analyze the ways in which GPO has continued its mission of "keeping America informed," giving increased emphasis on E-gov reforms and the role of the Congressional Joint Committee on Printing (JCP). Within this we will examine the winners and losers of Government Printing reform, and further analyze whether the GPO is fulfilling the needs of the citizenry. Finally, with an eye toward the future, this report will offer suggestions and solutions to the shortfalls of the Government Printing Office, and praise for its successes.

GPO: A Brief History of Public Printing

Although the Government Printing Office itself only dates back to 1860, the history of public printing parallels the history of the United State's itself. In the early workings of the United States, a set procedure for the printing of government material had yet to be established. Most printing was procured from regional printers who soon cornered the market on congressional printing. The printers were generally compensated very well for their work, as the new government did not want to cause any financial harm to private citizens for work that could be deemed a public service. In 1819, after three decades of printing without succinct standards, Congress passed the Printing Act of 1819, setting the rates for printing procured from private printers. However, continuous innovation in printing technology allowed these unmoving rates to yield increasingly higher profits to private firms. As the Jacksonian era's "Spoils System" infiltrated all levels of government, the realm of government printing was not immune. High profits for progressively simpler printing work ensured that public printing would be subject to the same tests of political patronage that corrupted so much of the U.S. government, since a good deal of money was to be made in government printing.

Understanding the faults of the 1819 Printing Act, congressional printing was adjusted to a system of contracting out services using a bidding process. Firms would offer competitive bids which would determine who received the contract. Under this system, competition was extremely fierce, but unfortunately this competition did not fix congressional printing. One of the major flaws with the contract system was congressional responses to printers who incurred a loss due to government printing. In 100 GPO Years, essentially an autobiography of the GPO's work, government reactions to private industry losses were as follows: "If [the printer] lost, he said: 'I unfortunately lost, and surely the government does not want me to do work for them and lose money.' The Appeal was usually met with a response by Congress, with deficiencies made up with bonuses."^{vii} This system created what is known in economics as a "moral hazard" in the truest form. Printers could underbid in order to obtain the contract, but they were ensured by Congressional actions that they would profit even when they were over-budget or delinquent on their contractual obligations. Former Public Printer Michael F. DiMario stated it simply: "Before GPO was established in 1861, Congress experimented with a variety of systems for contracting out its printing. These were widely acknowledged as failures for their inability to perform the work."^{viii}

1852 marked the first step toward centralizing government printing practices, as the establishment of the Congressional Joint Committee on Printing allowed congress a succinct avenue with which to monitor government printing practices. However, even with the JCP's new oversight capacity, government printing remained costly and unreliable. In 1860, Congress had finally had enough. The establishment of the Government Printing Office marked the beginning of an era of centralized congressional printing. Government printing under the GPO was quickly expanded from strictly congressional in nature to addressing Executive and Judicial needs as well. The Printing Act of 1895 codified both The Government Printing Office and The Joint Committee on Printing.

Understandably, the Government Printing Office's history thereafter is profoundly linked to the history, management, and size of the American bureaucratic state. With the growth of government in the late 19th and early 20th century, GPO was forced to expand both its capabilities and its workforce. Starting with the tenure of Franklin Roosevelt, GPO truly entered its heyday, as the New Deal and Johnson's Great Society caused a large uptick in printing needs from both congress and the executive agencies. The Government Printing Office of the 1940's, 50's, and 60's, also played a unique role in providing work to college age and minority students.

In an interview with Dwight Cropp, a Government Printing Office clerk during the late 1950's and current Professor of Political Administration at the George Washington University's Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration, he noted, "GPO was one of those government agencies... that provided meaningful employment, especially to African Americans... if you were in school like I was, it was a way of working part time and meeting your educational cost. Where I attended university, Howard University, a historically black college, there was a connection between the GPO and the Howard's student employment office in order to connect GPO with that population."^{ix} The purpose of this discussion is to illustrate that the History and precedential purpose of the Government Printing Office has always been two fold; meeting the needs of Congress, the Executive, and the Judiciary, but also meeting the needs of the citizenry, whether through the dissemination of information or simply through the thousands of individuals the GPO employed.

Government printing since that time has slowly devolved in both roles. Professor Cropp recalled from his time at the GPO, that "about 85 percent of the government publications were actually printed at GPO [in 1958-1961]... It was a much more centralized process at that time." This centralization has

been reversed since the 1960's, in part due to the size of the bureaucracy, but also due to a move toward privatization starting with the Reagan administration. According to Professor Cropp, "privatization and contracting out was emphasized... in the Reagan administration, Bush administration, and Clinton Administration, the idea being that you control the size of government and government spending, and save money by not paying benefits [to government printers]." In its role of providing for the citizenry, GPO was extremely prominent in citizens' lives in the 1940's and 1950's, but this too has diminished significantly. During our interview, Cropp noted that the GPO has lost prominence in American life, stating, "I would wager that most people today don't know anything about GPO, whereas in the 1950's and 60's, people were very familiar with GPO, because... GPO officials were very hands on in responding to public information requests and public demand for government publications. They are not as hands on now, and I would say that in terms of public awareness GPO is somewhat submerged in government now, it is not as visible."^x

As Professor Cropp detailed, the Government Printing Office has been shrinking in size over the past few decades. Just one example of this can be seen in the budget fights between President Clinton and the Congresses of the 1990s. Throughout the 1990s, the Joint Committee on Printing (JCP), an oversight body for the GPO, saw its budget shrink until eventually in the late 1990s it was eliminated altogether. Since 1999, the JCP has not received an independent appropriation. How is it supposed to effectively do its job without an appropriation and dedicated staff?

In the early 1970s, the GPO had 8,572 employees.^{xi} A fraction of that remains today; GPO has about 1,900 employees.^{xii} In its prime, the annual sale of printed physical copies of GPO products was about \$80 million, with about 10 percent of this being composed of *Federal Register* products.^{xiii} In FY 2011, GPO brought in just over \$11 million in sales.^{xiv} Since 2008, the number of physical copies of documents sold has fallen by nearly 40 percent from 1,263,659 copies to 770,579 copies.^{xv} Admittedly, much of the decline of both GPO's workforce and sales is indicative of advancements in technology and a lower demand for physical print copies of publications.

However, it also illustrates the reality that during this time the federal government has moved increasingly away from the physical printing of documents, and that the GPO's authority as the Government and Public printer has been consistently undermined. In fact, the GPO's own book celebrating its 150 year anniversary, states: "Today, GPO is far more an

information agency than a printing office, continuing to carry out Madison's dictum."^{xvi} The quote they reference from James Madison states:

“A popular Government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy, or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.”

While this quote may apply to GPO's online publications, their accommodation of individuals that rely on print media leaves much to be desired. Though one might not think that this would be a significant number of people in today's digital age, a 2012 study from Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project found that 22 % of Americans over the age of 18 do not use the internet.^{xvii} This represents over 50 million American citizens.^{xviii}

The GPO is now printing less than 2,600 copies of the *Federal Register* and less than 3,000 copies of the *Congressional Record* each day. At the height of printing, the GPO printed 45,000 physical copies of the *Congressional Record* daily.^{xix} While this may save some money and paper, it limits the accessibility of these records to members of the public who don't have access to the internet. Members of the House of Representatives can no longer give away copies of the *Congressional Record* to constituents, but members of the Senate can.

They even have had trouble obtaining pocket copies of the Constitution which used to be commonplace. The passage of House Concurrent Resolution 90 (H. Con. Res. 90), in the 112th Congress, slashed the number of pocket copies of the Constitution that would be made available to members of Congress. H. Con. Res. 90 directs the printing of the 25th edition of pocket copies of the Constitution. This concurrent resolution, however, cuts the number of pocket Constitutions from the previous 24th edition by over half. It supplies each House member with 500 copies and each Senator with 100 copies (a 90 percent cut in the Senate).^{xx} This may seem inconsequential to someone unfamiliar with the issue, but to members of Congress who regularly give out pocket copies of the Constitution to constituents and other visitors of their offices, this is an unfortunate change. For instance, Congressman Dennis Kucinich has been quoted saying that “In 2008, I passed out 25,000 copies of the Constitution.”^{xxi} Michael Harrison, Democratic Chief Counsel to the Committee on House Administration told us: “I received a call from a Congressman just the other day, who had run out and wanted another 1,500

pocket Constitutions. This is representative of how important these are to members of Congress.”^{xxii} As if it weren’t enough that this concurrent resolution was passed in the midst of a Congress in which talk of “upholding the Constitution” represents empty rhetoric, the resolution was spearheaded by the head of the Joint Committee on Printing, Congressman Gregg Harper.

Print copies of some committee hearings in the House of Representatives are even becoming hard to come by. The reason is that the committees in the House of Representatives must reimburse the GPO for printing their hearings out of the committee’s own budget, forcing committee chairs to pick and choose which committee hearings are important enough to be printed and recorded and which are not.

In order to better understand this devolution in Government printing, and the potential implications, one must first understand how GPO manages its two roles in serving the government and the public, and how it is faring in each.

Printing for the Government

Historically, the Government Printing Office has taken its role as the government printer, or at least as the congressional printer, extremely seriously. Appropriations for the Office are, under Title 44 of U.S code, a legislative matter after all, and the GPO has maintained high standards for their congressional customers. Furthermore, as dictated under Title 44, the Government Printing Office is subject to oversight by and policy changes from the Congressional Joint Committee on Printing. The Congressional Joint Committee on Printing, or JCP for short, has broad remedial powers under Title 44, allowing the JCP to “use any measures it considers necessary to remedy neglect, delay, duplication, or waste in the public printing and binding and the distribution of Government publications.” Despite this important authority, the JCP has been left to wither without an independent appropriation or dedicated staff since 1999, something we will discuss later.

Exemplifying their commitment to the legislature, GPO officials will unwaveringly boast that the Government Printing Office each day prints and delivers a hard copy of *The Congressional Record* to all 535 members of the House of Representatives and the Senate. GPO workers labor through the night to ensure that the print copy of every word spoken the previous day in both chambers is on the desks of each Senator and Congressman before daybreak. GPO has remarkably delivered the *Congressional Record* to its Congressional customers over 95% on-time, a truly remarkable feat.

The GPO functions both as a printer for legislators, the Executive, and the Judiciary, as well as a mediator in the private arena, negotiating contracts to outsource government publication and printing services. This has led the GPO to reduce its role and printing abilities substantially. However, the GPO still retains a major role in the printing of the *Congressional Record*, *Federal Register*, and documents relating to Legislative Measures, as well as other substantive publications from all three branches.

The Congressional Record remains the major publication printed in-house by the GPO. It records a verbatim account of the previous day’s action for both houses of Congress, and is given to all members of congress each morning. As of 2010, all Senators were granted 50 copies daily, all Representatives were granted 37, and these can be used by either their office or given to various constituent groups. *The Congressional Record* is also given to legislative committees, judicial bodies, executive agencies, and numerous public institutions including the Federal Depository Library Program. *The*

Federal Register is, according to its website, the “official daily publication for rules, proposed rules, and notices of Federal agencies and organizations, as well as executive orders and other presidential documents.”^{xxiii} Read widely by business, non-profits, and constituents alike, the *Federal Register* is used to solicit comment and inform the public on new rules and administrative notices. Together, the *Congressional Record* and the *Federal Register* provide constituents a snapshot of the activities of Congress and the executive agencies.

The Government Printing office is also required by law to print a variety of legislative measures. These printing requirements are set under Title 44, as revised over the decades.

The GPO maintains a state of the art printing facility for printing the aforementioned documents as well as other requests from the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches. The GPO runs its operations on both appropriations and sales. According to frequently asked questions on gpo.gov, “unlike most Federal agencies, GPO operates much like a business - it is reimbursed by its customers for the cost of work performed.” Those customers primarily include agencies of the federal government. The GPO takes on the persona of a private business in its operating procedures, selling their services and goods for slightly above the value taken to produce. This profit margin allows the Government Printing Office to maintain its General Sales division that Congressional funds are not appropriated for, and also allows for investment in equipment and new technology that appropriations do not fully cover. The GPO also relies on Congress for two separate appropriations each year. The first is to cover the costs of congressional printing, from legislative materials to congressional members’ copies of the *Congressional Record* and other publications. The second appropriation is used for funding the “cataloging, indexing, distribution and online access to Government documents.”

Although historically GPO has handled most government printing in-house, over the past few decades GPO has drastically cut its own involvement in government printing. In fact, the GPO currently outsources almost 75 % of its printing to private printers. A 2004 GAO report shows 79% of all GPO print jobs for Congress or the federal agencies were filled in the private marketplace.^{xxiv} More recently in FY 2011 the GPO reported that it procured about 73.2 %, or \$392.8 million, of all work requisitioned by Federal agencies. This was a small drop from previous years, but was attributable to a decline in executive branch agency printing requirements.^{xxv}

These print jobs fall under two basic categories: large print projects and simple print projects. Large projects are projects over \$10,000. For large projects the GPO acts as an intermediary in the private market, negotiating contracts with private industry. This is through what is known as the GPO's Printing Procurement Program. GPO customers become private industry customers and, as a result, pay a fee to GPO for helping acquire the services.^{xxvi} The Government Printing Office has only just streamlined the print procurement process for Simple Projects, projects under \$10,000. Until recently, all projects had to go through GPO into the marketplace. Now, however, the GPO has streamlined the process of printing for jobs that cost less than \$10,000. These jobs can use the system of simplified purchase agreements, a network of preapproved printers through which the GPO has already negotiated the terms of service. According to the terms of Simplified Purchase Agreements,

“This is a new procurement vehicle being established by the GPO in order to provide a simple, easy-to use method of procuring a wide range of printing and printing related services valued at under \$10,000.00 per order... Factors other than price may be used in determining with whom to place an individual order. There are no limitations on the types of printed products or services that may be provided under these agreements. Agreements will only be entered into with contractors who certify that the pricing they provide under this agreement will be equivalent to or lower than those provided to any other customer. GPO will review the prices provided on a continuing basis and will terminate agreements with contractors whose pricing violates this certification or is otherwise determined to be unfair or unreasonable.^{xxvii}

Through these simplified purchase agreements, government employees can avoid going through the GPO for smaller purchases. For example, FedEx Kinko's and the GPO have partnered to offer government patrons access to small- scale printing at any FedEx Kinko's location for predetermined prices.^{xxviii}

The People's Printer:

As many of our nation's founding fathers have said in the past, an informed public is essential to a thriving and functional democracy. The GPO provides the citizens with that information which is necessary for people to carry out their civic responsibilities and to cast informed votes – including the text of Congressional Bills, Supreme Court Decisions, the *Congressional Record*, Congressional hearings and reports, weekly Presidential Documents, and everything in between. But the GPO and FDLP system provide a whole range of information above and beyond that which would be useful for citizens to carry out their civic responsibilities.

GPO's publications could help parents, in the case of their publication, *Infant Care*. Businesses that need to stay up-to-date with federal regulations may be interested in the GPO's Code of Federal Regulations – an annual publication. Consumers who may have a wide range of needs or concerns can find something for them, whether it is a concern about the safety of chemicals used in their food, the proper way to cook a chicken, the financial stability and soundness of their bank, or something as trivial as the important things to know when buying jewelry. The GPO's *Chicken From Farm to Table* can provide tips on how to prepare chicken safely, transcripts from Congressional hearings during – and following – the financial crisis may be of use to consumers concerned about their banks, and *All That Glitters... How To Buy Jewelry* helps consumers determine what questions are important to ask when buying jewelry for a loved one.

Although the Government Printing Office's role as the government printer should not be understated, the GPO is first and foremost beholden to the people. The printing of government publications and documents is meaningless if it does not benefit the American public. Perhaps the most important role that GPO serves is that of "keeping America informed." This responsibility currently falls on Davita Vance-Cooks, the acting public printer.

This entails not only printing and publication, but the dissemination of government documents to a wanting populace. In this role the GPO has made huge strides forward within the past decades by increasing online access. Unfortunately, in pursuing this goal, the GPO has neglected physical printing and, in the process, threatened to take a few steps backward in its goal of keeping the public informed.

Multiple avenues have emerged to provide the citizenry with greater access to information, and both the GPO and government institutions working

with the GPO have been extremely quick in adapting to the changing environment. With the rise of the internet, the GPO has moved much of its dissemination operations online through the FDSys, or Federal Digital System. Making this information available online has given many citizens free access to a plethora of government documents and publications. There now exist a range of portals for citizens to take advantage of, including websites operated by other branches of the federal government like THOMAS, data.gov, and USA.gov.

With this rise in online access, many of the traditional lines of dissemination have begun to fade away. In 2001, the GPO had 23 remaining brick-and-mortar bookstores in major cities across the United States.^{xxix} However, in response to a decline in sales revenue, the GPO closed all but one of these stores by September 2003.^{xxx} The only brick and mortar GPO bookstore that remains today can be found on North Capitol Street, in Washington, D.C. However, GPO Print sales, the National Archives, and the Federal Depository Library Program must still remain a vital artery for information to flow to the citizenry. FDSys, short for the Federal Digital System, is the Government Printing Office's newest database for online cataloging of government documents printed by the GPO. This new system, which became fully functional on November 5, 2011, far exceeds the previous capabilities of GPO Access. Whereas, GPO Access housed the online database of government publications for free public access, GPO has touted this new Federal Digital System as a way to amalgamate much of GPO's online tools onto one site. According to the GPO this will include publishing, allowing patrons such as "Congress and Federal agencies... to submit files and orders electronically to GPO for printing and publishing services, electronic distribution, and inclusion in the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP)", a more sophisticated search mechanism, preservation of government documents to "ensure public access to government information even as technology changes," and version control.^{xxxi} FDSys currently provides free access to about 380,000 documents with this number expanding every day.

Another major avenue for online government information is THOMAS. Through its work with the GPO, the Library of Congress has developed THOMAS to provide online access to legislative measures in a clear, easily searchable format. THOMAS offers online access to the following:

"Bills and Resolutions- full text after 1989, Public Laws- Status of laws after 1973 Full Text of laws after 1989, House and Senate Roll Call Votes after 1990 and 1989 respectively, Sponsors of Legislation After 1973, Congressional Record: 1989- Current Congress, Committee Reports- Full

Text after 1995, Presidential Nominations After 1987, Treaties: Partial Coverage after 1967 (90th) Full Text after 1975 (94th)”^{xxxii}

Since its creation, THOMAS has increased transparency and access to legislative measures for any online user.

Other branches of the U.S. federal government have developed online portals that either simplify or aggregate both GPO’s publications and additional government information. Two examples of such portals are USA.gov and Data.gov. USA.gov is literally a “one stop shop” website for almost all government information. Although it contains little information from its own databases, its search tool links users to other pages (such as FDSys or THOMAS) depending on the request. Data.gov is an online database for government data with the purpose “to increase public access to high value, machine readable datasets generated by the Executive Branch of the Federal Government.”^{xxxiii} Through these and other portals, online access to usable government information has ballooned in the past decades, providing the online portion of the American public with timely, reliable information.

Print media, however, still remains important and both the GPO’s bookstore and the Federal Depository Library Program must continue to allow citizens to access these products. The GPO Bookstore, known internally as the General Sales Division, offers print collections of its publications to private citizens at retail prices. Access to these materials can be found either online or via catalog. However, this practice of selling print media is plagued by both increasing prices and a disastrous destruction policy. Prices for GPO publications have risen much faster than inflation, driving down much private demand. Furthermore, with the new online formats available for free, print collections are desired even less by online users. Despite the benefits of putting this information online, citizens without access to the internet feel the negative ramifications of decreased demand for print copies. The popularity of online content has not only made printing publications more costly for the GPO because fewer and fewer people are purchasing these hard copies, but it consequently creates an incentive for GPO to stop printing the material that they publish online. GPO’s inventory policy mandates that when a publication reaches certain benchmarks of declining sales, it shall be destroyed to make room for more popular inventory. Publications marked for destruction are, by law, required to be offered back to the department from which it originated, so as to assess whether that department would like the excess copies. If the department declines, the GPO destroys the publications as scrap. We will examine these deficiencies in detail later.

The Federal Depository Library Program is a collection of about 1,200 libraries that receive free copies of certain government publications for the public's viewing.^{xxxiv} The majority of Federal Depository Libraries are "selective" in nature, meaning that each library must choose the GPO publications it would like to collect. Tina Plottel, Depository Coordinator for the George Washington University's Federal Depository collection, likens the system to the "Columbia record and tape club, you can cancel a document anytime, but you can only change what you're collecting one time during every year."^{xxxv} A list is provided to each depository library, and they can choose what selections they wish to add to their collections. Selective Libraries are able to collect as many or as few of the total government publications available.

For example, the Library of Congress itself became a "Selective" depository library in 1978, and it too must decide the volume of documents it wishes to collect. In an interview with Sara Striner, Head of Government Publications and Periodicals Section of the Library of Congress, she described that "we select about 94% of items offered to depository libraries for this depository set... However, we are unique among libraries since lots of libraries depend on the Federal Depository Library Program for a good part of their government acquisitions... at the library, we have always been able to get free government publications due to our stature as the National library and the Congressional library."^{xxxvi} Ms. Plottel mentioned that George Washington University collects around 23 percent of government publications offered.^{xxxvii}

Selective Federal Depository Libraries must hold on to government publications for at least 5 years, and at that time they are required to offer them back to a Regional Federal Depository Library. Regional Federal Depository Libraries receive the full collection of GPO publications and coordinate FDLP interlibrary acquisitions between those in their region. They too must hold onto government publications for a minimum of 5 years, if in either case no Federal Depository Library would like the printing for their collection, it can be destroyed.

Another aspect of the Federal Depository Library Program, FDLP Desktop provides library patrons an online search engine for FDLP and GPO resources, as well as information on selections available at their Federal Depository Library. The Federal Depository Library Program allows access to individuals who lack the ability to view GPO's materials in print or online due to either monetary or geographical constraints. However, solely relying on FDLP to provide for those without access would be imperfect and unjust, harming not

only those constituents left out, but also the democratic process, as we will discuss later.

One of the most pertinent issues involved in “keeping America informed” is how to archive government information so that it retains its value to the citizenry in the long-run. Minority and majority staffers at the Joint Committee on Printing both acknowledged that paper is the only proven technology to last for hundreds of years.^{xxxviii} Manufacturers of CDs and DVDs have claimed that the lifespan of these optical storage media can range from 15 to 200 years.^{xxxix} However, despite these estimates, the National Archives and Records Administration acknowledges that manufacturers often overstate their own products’ lifespan and suggests that the reliable “experiential life” of CDs and DVDs is only 2 to 5 years.^{xl} In 2010, an issue of “Conserve O Gram”, a publication from the National Park Service, discussed digital storage media and directed readers to:

“Produce hard copies on archival paper or microforms of important data wherever possible. This prevents data loss due to obsolescence or unexpected media failure. Archival paper can endure centuries, while the lifespan of digital formats is limited to years, or decades at best.”^{xli}

GPO’s Federal Digital System (FDSys) is attempting to bring about a permanent record for documents that are being produced *now*, with varied results.

However, until recently GPO had little involvement in providing a long-lasting record of government publications. Perhaps the most prominent archivist, the National Archives (NARA), plays an important role in informing the public by maintaining a record of government documents. Despite this, NARA should not have been and cannot be the lone archivist of government and historical records. According to the National Archives’ website, “NARA keeps only those Federal records that are judged to have continuing value—about 2 to 5 percent of those generated in any given year... All of these materials are preserved because they are important to the workings of Government, have long-term research worth, or provide information of value to citizens.”^{xlii} This policy of preserving only those documents that NARA deems necessary leaves long-term preservation of public information up to subjectivity. The National Archives is in a state of hubris to believe that it can predict what will be necessary information for the Public and what will not. However, NARA’s role in helping the GPO keep Americans informed cannot be understated. It just cannot be seen as the only archival process worth using in its current state.

NARA has also been increasingly involved in shaping preservation and information technology in recent years. One of NARA's largest projects related to this is the Electronic Records Archives (ERA). According to NARA, "ERA is the National Archives and Records Administration's strategic initiative to preserve and provide long-term access to uniquely valuable electronic records of the U.S. Government, and to transition government-wide management of the lifecycle of all records into the realm of e-government."^{xliii} Using this process, NARA hopes to amalgamate what is left of GPO documents from the past, archiving records that should have been preserved by the Government Printing Office previously.

Analysis of GPO Practices:

With the immense breadth and depth of GPO's work, the Government Printing Office has a distinct responsibility to effectively carry out its work for the people. GPO has done exceedingly well in some areas, and has shown itself to be abhorrently deficient in others.

Expanded Access and Transparency

Online access to government information dates back to the early 1990's, as GPO Access was launched in 1994 under congressional direction. According to a 2004 summary by the Government Printing Office, "GPO Access began by offering no-fee service to federal depository libraries and paid subscriptions to others." Eventually, this information would be made free to the public, but prior to this, subscriptions to the *Congressional Record* and *Federal Register* cost as much as \$375. Free online access came only after many citizen rights groups called for provisions like "free after six" or other options to increase access. Just one of the proposals at the time, "free after six" would have made the *Congressional Record* and *Federal Register* available to the public for free during "non-peak" hours, between 6 PM and 8 AM. This proposal allowed the GPO to collect fees from non-profits and businesses that needed access to this government information during business hours, but at the same time open up a plethora of government information to the public for free.^{xliv} The Government Printing Office, with Congressional funding answered the call and "18 months later the paid subscriptions were dropped [as] GPO began to provide no-fee public access, not just to depository libraries, but also to the general public."^{xlv} This was a huge gain for citizens everywhere as costly publications could now be downloaded for free at home.

The online instruments of GPO, namely FDSys and formally GPO Access, have also had a profound impact on the cost structure of NGO's and non-profits in the United States. Whereas previously, non-profits and NGO's had to purchase print materials from GPO's General Sales Program, online access has eliminated these costs, allowing them to use these funds for advocacy or other operational expenses. Although the institutions impacted range from the smallest consumer groups to the largest NGO's, a tangible example of one group that has benefited provides depth to this discussion. Bradley Gernand, Library manager for the Institute for Defense Analyses, responded to our inquiry by writing, "We applaud GPO's modernization efforts... We no longer

purchase a couple of book series—the presidential papers, as example—because they’re now online at GPO.” He explains that although “this represents a fairly minor change to our acquisition policies,” it is a noticeable benefit of GPO’s online efforts.^{xlvi}

The Government Printing Office’s online publication of invaluable government material is nothing to scoff at. It provides immediate access to citizens and citizen groups alike. Much of the research that has been done for this report has come from GPO’s online resources.

Beyond FDSys and GPO Access, the Government Printing Office has continually worked to answer the calls of Congress and the Executive alike. With regard to congressional leadership, the E-Gov Act of 2002 further emphasized the importance of online information to the citizenry. As the law reads, its purpose is “To enhance the management and promotion of electronic Government services and processes by establishing a Federal Chief Information Officer within the Office of Management and Budget, and by establishing a broad framework of measures that require using Internet-based information technology to enhance citizen access to Government information and services.” This law has influenced the immense push toward digitizing even more GPO publications and executive documents.

Pressure from the Executive Branch has increased with the Obama administration, as domestic transparency has been emphasized. On the first day of his administration, Barack Obama issued a memorandum, calling for transparency and openness from the executive agencies. He wrote, “My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government.”^{xlvii}

Despite this statement, President Obama has failed to follow through on many of his promises of increased transparency. To this day there still remains much secrecy in foreign, military, and homeland security affairs. And while great strides were taken to move much government information (including expenditures) online, full texts of hundreds of billions of dollars of contracts between government and companies are still nowhere to be found. With President Obama’s focus on online access to government documents, the shift away from print has accelerated during his Presidency and the 112th

Congress.^{xlviii} Despite these letdowns, the GPO has been helping to promote openness across all levels of the federal government.

In the past few years, Government agencies and GPO have responded to the call and have been working together to provide transparency online. One of the most notable changes GPO has undertaken has been their efforts in making government information increasingly usable to tech-savvy citizens. One such example was converting the *Federal Register's* online publication into XML format, offering users greater search-ability and digital manipulation. Former Public Printer Robert Tapella offered praise to the joint work of GPO, NARA, and the Office of the Federal Register in reaching this achievement stating:

“I want to congratulate GPO employees who worked with The White House and the Office of Federal Register in providing the American people the tools to provide openness and transparency to the documents of our democracy. GPO’s Federal Digital System not only provides transparency to our Government, but provides Americans a permanent repository of authentic Federal Government information.”^{xlix}

The GPO’s increasing use of online media for citizen access has provided vital information to those who can afford and have access to the internet. GPO has done very well in opening up even low level government documents to online access, and citizens have started taking advantage of the new online media. In 2004, when *GPO Access* was the primary online access point to GPO publications, GPO reported “over 1 million files downloaded per day – the equivalent of 27 million typeset pages.”ⁱ According to Andrew Sherman, GPO’s Chief Communications Officer, “Currently, more than 13.1 million documents are retrieved from GPO’s online services every month, and the number continues to grow.”ⁱⁱ The incredible amount of information that is being disseminated to the general public due to FDSys cannot be understated.

It seems logical that this online access to information cannot be a “bad” thing for an informed citizenry. It is true that there are shortfalls that come with online publishing, as we will discuss in detail later, but the intent of the process, informing the citizenry and making government transparent deserves the utmost recognition. Sara Striner reiterated this point in our interview by noting, “I think the online access has improved [informing the citizenry].”ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, the majority of those I’ve interviewed have shared this same sentiment. While this report will give focus to the deficiencies with current GPO practices, these should not take away from GPO’s purpose or successes in posting

government information online. The openness, transparency, and free access to government information for millions of Americans online deserves immense praise, even if other avenues have fallen short.

Fulfillment of Other Fruitful Government Initiatives

The Government Printing Office also deserves praise in areas related to beneficial government-wide initiatives. One of widest initiatives has been GPO's adoption of more environmentally friendly practices. The GPO has, in recent years, jumped on board with the "going green" spirit. To facilitate this goal, both the *Congressional Record* and *Federal Register* are now printed on 100% recycled paper. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi praised the effort of "putting the official proceedings of Congress on recycled paper" noting that it "is good for our environment and good for our future." She noted the GPO's efforts were extremely helpful in "the 'Green the Capitol' program - making sustainability a priority, placing conservation and energy efficiency at the top of our agenda, and putting America's leaders at the forefront of an issue that affects all Americans."^{liii} GPO's leadership in acquiring and using recycled paper for both the *Congressional Record* and the *Federal Register* has an impact, as the *Congressional Record* currently circulates less than 3,000 physical copies printed daily. As the largest printer in the world, GPO will provide an important precedent for large scale and small scale printing operations.

Unfortunately, this is where praise for Government Printing Office practices must halt. Although the GPO has realized many accomplishments, myriad deficiencies remain and must be corrected in the near future. Obsessive outsourcing, an ineffective Congressional oversight committee, discrimination of those not online, online version control and archiving, and an abhorrent destruction policy all plague the Government Printing Office. Each of these conditions will be addressed in turn.

The Problem with Outsourcing

Over the past decades, the Government Printing office has decreased its relative role in printing government publications. It has instead relied on its authority to arrange for publication in the private sphere. As previously mentioned, GPO handled around 85% of government printing during its heyday in the 1950's according to Professor Dwight Cropp, a GPO employee from 1958-61.^{liv} Today, however, the inverse is true. According to a 2004 GAO report, as much as 79 percent of work is outsourced by the GPO. More recently in FY 2011 the GPO reported that it procured about 73.2 %, or \$392.8 million, of all work requisitioned by Federal agencies. This was a small drop from previous years, but was attributable to a decline in executive branch agency printing requirements.^{lv}

Outsourcing results in the reduction of the GPO workforce, a trend that has been continuing at the GPO in the past few decades. Since the early 1970s, GPO has slashed its workforce by 6,500 employees, reducing it from 8,572 to just 1,900. Most recently, in June 2011, the decline in paper printing by GPO due to online publication and outsourcing has led to GPO attempting to buy out as many as 330 employees.^{lvi} This change is substantial, and the decision to contract increasingly more should not be taken lightly. Despite these changes, GPO's in-house printing operation still remains vital to the daily workings of Congress. Michael Harrison, Democratic Chief Counsel to the Committee on House Administration said, "The central GPO plant is essential to the work of Congress... Some days the GPO has to print just a few dozen pages [for the *Congressional Record*], others it is hundreds. No other private printer has the flexibility to serve Congress' erratic printing needs."^{lvii}

The use of contracting and privatization of government work began most prominently in the Reagan administration. The rationale was to reduce costs through competition in the private market. Logically these cost savings come in either efficiencies through best practices or through savings in labor. However, according to Professor Dwight Cropp, with regards to the GPO, "the major savings are in personnel costs both in terms of salaries and benefits. Once you get out of the process of funding annual salary increases, health insurance, and leave you are saving close to 30 percent."^{lviii}

By cutting its own capabilities and thus its own staff, the GPO does not provide many of the social benefits it could during the early and mid 20th century. Although the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) does regulate compliance with Executive Order 11246, requiring

government contractors to institute affirmative action programs, socially beneficial programs, such as the agreement with Howard University mentioned earlier, are much easier to manage directly under GPO. By unnecessarily outsourcing, not based on best practices, but based on lower worker pay, the GPO loses these opportunities as well.

In order to reform the current Contract system, the roots of the problems must be addressed first. Equal pay for equal work must be codified in outsourcing. Government contracted printers, while working on government projects, should be required by law to provide employees the same benefits and pay that GPO employees would receive for equal work. Since the Public Printer is by law setting a “just wage” for a worker doing government printing work, all workers doing government printing work, whether in the private or public sphere should receive the same treatment. If the private printer can maintain more efficient printing than the GPO even after it provides its employees with equivalent wages, this would help to identify those private firms that are actually achieving cost savings due to improved technologies, efficiencies, or other best practices, instead of on the backs of workers. In creating a healthy and effective market that favors efficiency and best practices over labor exploitation, this would not only benefit workers, but taxpayers as well. Government printing, by both the GPO and private printers, would thus be more efficient and just to workers.

Joint Committee on Printing - Defunded, Ineffective, Unmoving

The Congressional Joint Committee on Printing (JCP) was established just before the GPO in order to oversee congressional printing practices. Section 1 of Title 44 of the US code grants it broad overreaching powers: “any measures it considers necessary to remedy neglect, delay, duplication, or waste in the public printing and binding and the distribution of Government publications.” However, rather than taking this ambiguity to take control of government printing, and ensure it works for the public good, the Joint Committee on Printing has tied its movements to one word of that definition: “remedy.” The Joint Committee on Printing has merely gone through the motions, reacting to problems with the GPO only as they arise.

The Joint Committee on Printing has been officially gaveled to order just once during the 112th Congress. In layman’s terms, this means that the Committee has had one official meeting. That meeting lasted for two minutes, from 11:39 A.M. to 11:41 A.M. on June 22, 2011.^{lix} During this meeting, the Committee rules for the 112th Congress were adopted and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman were elected.^{lx} As of the publication of this report, the JCP had no future meetings scheduled and had no calendar of having past or planning future hearings. Tellingly, when one queries the “Recent Activity” search function at the bottom of the Joint Committee on Printing’s website, the search returns no results for any of the search options: “Bills,” “Hearings,” “Markups,” or “Everything.”^{lxi}

Why has the JCP done so little? At least part of the reason is that it has not received an independent appropriation since 1999. After becoming Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich was on the warpath to shrink the size of government with his “Contract with America.” Speaker Gingrich was desperate to shutter a significant government agency and eliminate what he perceived as government waste. Within a year of becoming Speaker of the House, Gingrich shut down the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), a Congressional office that provided invaluable objective analysis of complex scientific and engineering issues. He didn’t get rid of the OTA statutorily, however – the law creating it was still on the books. Instead, he simply defunded its approximately \$20 million annual budget, eliminating the OTA in one fell swoop.

This is relevant to the JCP because, simply put, this is precisely what happened to the Joint Committee on Printing. When Newt Gingrich became Speaker in 1995, he slashed many Committee budgets and staff. The JCP’s

independent appropriations dropped from \$1,414,000 in 1995 to \$202,000 by 1999 before its budget was eliminated entirely. Instead of being completely abolished as an institution, the JCP still exists today, but it persists with no funding and no dedicated staff, leaving it in a sort of limbo where it floats along aimlessly. At one time, the Joint Committee on Printing had almost 15 staff. Now, the JCP has no dedicated or full-time staff, but is instead sustained by just a few staffers of the Committee on House Administration who do their work for the JCP categorized as “other duties as assigned.”^{lxii} Unfortunately, those other duties seem to be few and far between. That the JCP didn’t end up being completely abolished wasn’t for lack of trying, however: In the period from 1995 to 1999, several bills were proposed that would have completely eliminated the JCP (S. 2288 in the 105th Congress, H.R. 252 in the 104th Congress, and H. Res. 24 in the 104th Congress).

The JCP is composed of ten members of the House and Senate with the chairmanship and vice-chairmanship alternating between the House and Senate every two years. Its current members in the House of Representatives include Gregg Harper (R, MS-03, Chair), Daniel Lungren (R, CA-03), Aaron Schock (R, IL-18), Robert Brady (D, PA-01), and Charles Gonzalez (D, TX-20). In the Senate, the members of the committee are Chuck Schumer (D-NY, Vice-Chair), Patty Murray (D-WA), Tom Udall (D-NM), Lamar Alexander (R-TN), and Saxby Chambliss (R-GA). Recently the JCP has shown itself either unwilling or unable to protect the interest of citizens in the realm of government printing.

Among other interviews conducted for this report, we reached out to the majority staff assigned to work on behalf of the Joint Committee on Printing. Though the majority staff of the Joint Committee on Printing was kind enough to meet with us and provide us with written responses to some questions that we posed, they were politely unresponsive to many of our queries.

The JCP is stagnant and in drastic need of reform. The Joint Committee on Printing has adopted no serious resolutions since the late 1990’s, and indeed the 112th, 111th, and 110th Congress’s JCP do not have any resources online regarding their actions. Though at this point, the website is up-to-date, as recently as late 2011, the website for the Joint Committee on Printing^{lxiii}, a committee that oversees GPO’s *online* and print practices, listed members and resources from the earlier 109th Congress’s JCP!! This is hardly conducive to a level of alertness and understanding regarding who the Joint Committee is and what they have recently done. However, this goes deeper than just the dismaying failure to simply update their materials. The Joint Committee on Printing, has, throughout its history, been hopelessly reactive rather than

proactive. This can be seen in the fact that no substantial hearings have been called for by the JCP in either of the previous Congressional sessions to evaluate GPO policies and procedures. As we see in this report, GPO is at a crucial point in its history. The online switch and other GPO initiatives must be more thoroughly examined than citizens' groups can accomplish by themselves. As the one built-in oversight body for the Government Printing Office, the Joint Committee on Printing has stood inert during a true turning point in the direction of Government printing.

Rather than the JCP, the Government Printing Office has been beholden to one key body, the House Appropriations Committee. GPO officials obediently prepare statements and requests to present to the House and Senate Appropriations hearings each and every fiscal year. Although this process is important, it cannot be seen as extensive. GPO's appropriations deal primarily with where it needs money under its current practices, but when are the questions posed about whether current practices are the best practices for the citizenry? That is the role of the Joint Committee on Printing, a role it has taken far too lightly, if at all.

When will the JCP start to fulfill its purpose? Does it require a disastrous failure of GPO? If the Joint Committee on Printing continues to be unfunded and use a reactive strategy, only responding when mostly bureaucratic problems with the GPO arise, then we the citizenry are destined to first absorb the consequences of GPO failures before we gain the benefits of improvement. This must change. The Joint Committee on Printing should immediately begin, at the very minimum, thorough yearly hearings on printing practices and citizen access to publications. Not only will this allow the JCP to be proactive in its legislation and directions, but it will also remind Government Printing Office officials that they are working for the people, not just their tax money.

Not online? Not our problem- The issue with High Price Documents and full reliance on the Federal Depository Library Program

The United States of America is 3.79 million square miles^{lxiv}. As noted earlier, there are currently around 1,208 Federal Deposit Libraries in the United States, most being “selective” in nature. By simple calculation that amounts to one depository library per 3,137 square miles in the United States. This shows the audacity in GPO’s insistence that the FDLP can be seen as the major resource of government publications for those who cannot access free information online.

The Federal Depository Library Program is composed of “selective” and “regional” depository libraries. The majority of federal depository libraries are “selective”, meaning that each library must choose the GPO publications it would like to collect. “Regional” depository libraries are especially important because they retain a copy of all government publications received, and provide selective depository libraries with collection development, reference and research services, and loaning materials since their collections are larger. They also help with FDLP policies.

In the wake of the recent financial collapse and economic downturn, libraries throughout the country are struggling to remain open. Many have resorted to cutting services, slashing hours of operation, or reducing their collections or staff. These problems have not left the FDLP untouched. In 2011, the FDLP lost 15 libraries. And today there are only 47 regional depository libraries, when as recently as 2003 there were 53.

As recently as October, 2011, Michigan was added to the list of states that were without regional depository libraries which already included Colorado and Nevada. The University of Minnesota libraries offered to act as a regional depository library for the state of Michigan, but the GPO rejected this proposal and has dragged its feet on fixing this issue. These are disturbing developments which threaten the availability of government documents and information to citizens throughout the country.

Even if you are lucky enough to be close to a FDLP library, most are selective and may not have what you need or are looking for. FDLP libraries may not be physically accessible to all, especially those most likely not to have internet access: the poor and the elderly. Thus, for these individuals, the General Sales Program may be the only option or opportunity to gain valuable information on the workings of the U.S. government.

From publications providing tax help, to those describing the social security benefits seniors receive, and even to the most specialized publications, the General Sales Program has an obligation to provide for the citizenry. This obligation remains important even as a large percentage of the citizenry stops using the service. However, in this role, the GPO has been inexcusably inept. The Government Printing Office's incessant focus on online publication at the expense of the General Sales Program has left many Americans without the information they need. Unintentionally discriminatory to minorities, the poor, and the elderly, the shift in focus to online access and other policies of the GPO have caused soaring prices in their print publications due to low demand and the resulting losses incurred by the General Sales Program.

GPO's General Sales Division is in shambles. A 2004 GPO summary issued this bleak report:

Revenues have dropped from over \$80 million to \$30 million in 10 years. At one time GPO sold over 35,000 paid subscription to the *Federal Register*; now GPO sells less than 2,700 copies, while customers download in excess of 4 million free *Federal Register* documents per month. *GPO Access* has improved public access, but destabilized the Sales Program, which, in the past, was an important part of the overall revenue and income for GPO, making significant contributions to GPO's overhead and its economic well being.^{lxv}

Since then, the GPO's sales revenues dropped even further to \$11,366,266 in FY 2011. With the massive losses that followed, at times over 1 million dollars per month, the GPO began to rethink its general sales program. At a conference regarding the issue, suggestions were offered from business executives and government experts on how best to plug up the bleeding program. Some saw the program as completely obsolete, and others saw a need to charge for the online content. The discussion mirrored the ideas and ponderings of other print media distributors, but luckily, the Public Printer and the GPO decided neither to discontinue printing physical copies nor to charge for online access, while many private media groups did.

When asked about the decline of print media, Tina Plotell, the Coordinator for the George Washington University's Federal Depository collection, offered the perspective of a librarian and a citizen, predicting:

"...as long as there is poverty there will be print materials. I think that is true about government information as well, and in that case it's an even more powerful thing to think about because those are the people who need the government information the most. They need to know what

their rights are and need to have access to [those materials]. Whether that is printed by the GPO or by other groups that sell it, I don't know. I think that's something to be really worried about."

This statement also raises a more practical question. How can the poor gain access to necessary information as the digital divide grows? Like the proverbial tree in the forest, will the poor lose this access, lose their right to information, all without anyone noticing? They don't have the tools or the money to be heard, and with prices of government publications rising, they never will. According to a 2011 study of online access by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, only 32.1% of Americans living in a household with income under \$15,000 had broadband internet access in their home in 2010. Middle income families, with incomes of \$35,000-\$50,000 and \$50,000-\$75,000, fared better at 63.4% and 73.6% internet access, respectively. At the other extreme, 89.6% of Americans in households with income above \$150,000 had broadband access to the internet.^{lxvi}

This stark contrast here between rich and poor shows that true scope of the digital divide in America, and GPO seems not to understand this. Online publications are crucial to an informed citizenry in this day and age, but there must also be affordable avenues for those not online. The prohibitive cost of important publications like *The Congressional Record*, selling for about \$503 for an annual subscription in 2012, ensures that those without internet access, but who are active citizens and consumers, remain uninformed and thus many times unable to use and benefit from these many materials. The cost of these materials has skyrocketed in the past few decades, further widening the gap in access to information between the rich and poor. In 1979, an annual subscription to *The Congressional Record* was \$75. Even accounting for inflation this means, that at today's prices, the cost for this important information has more than doubled. Of the top 500 books the GPO sold in FY 2011, the prices varied from \$3.00 for the lowest priced item to \$426 for the highest priced item. The average price was \$47.00.^{lxvii} The average price even for a hardcover book in a typical bookstore is just about \$30. However, the discriminatory digital divide is far greater than just income based. Minorities, especially African Americans, and the elderly are far behind the majority white and young population in terms of internet use. In a 2012 study from Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project, 49 % of Blacks had access to broadband internet at home compared to 66 % of their white counterparts. In the same Pew study, 94% of Americans age 18-29 were

internet users, 87% of adults age 30-49, and 74% of adults age 50-64. However, the ageist divide is markedly shown as only 41% of Americans age 65 or older were internet users.^{lxviii} The discriminatory digital divide offers a valid question that lawmakers must answer. If taxpayer money is being used to provide free online cataloguing and access to most government publications for the majority of the population, why is the minority being so severely ignored?

In order to fulfill its role of “Keeping America Informed” in an equitable way, a new system of equal access should accompany the GPO’s online resources. While Congressional appropriations feed into the majority’s information gathering, the minority must too benefit from the innovations and advances. One way to accomplish this may be a need based pricing system at the GPO, where free or reduced priced print publications are offered to those citizens who qualify monetarily.

GPO must also do a much better job in marketing what is out there for the population. While online users have the whole catalogue of GPO publications at their fingertips for online reading or print publication, those who are not online are rarely targeted in marketing, and thus have very little way of knowing what is available to them. The GPO must always keep in mind that not all Americans are online, and that online users are not their only customers. It is imperative that GPO and other stakeholders in this issue find a solution within the very near future. Immediately creating a five year plan with equal access to all Americans as the objective would focus GPO and congressional efforts on a solution. Print media definitely needs some help and a reworking of the model in which it currently operates, but as Ms. Plottel noted those who need the information most are those who need print media.^{lxix}

Version Control and Archives- the problem with Electronic Media

Print Media also offers two key features that have yet to be perfected in an electronic format. Version Control and Archiving are two of the most crucial aspects of government documents today, and yet digital media finds itself oddly behind the antiquated method of printing. Version control is a certification process by which one can guarantee that a document is either the most up to date or a version free from tampering. With Hard Copies, storing records of information is extremely accurate in that in order to change a record, a new one must be printed. However, since electronic documents can be altered, a new notion of version control must be taken into account. Take a bill for example. Bills must go through many revision processes before they are enacted into law. The question becomes which revisions should be kept for the historical record. This is integral to the operation of our democracy, since much of a representative's work comes not in voting, but in drafting and revising bills and resolutions. Thus, voters should be aware of, and have access to, their representative's work in these areas. However, how does one offer and maintain those copies and editions. This is where electronic version control may fall short. GPO has worked diligently on developing a system, and recently came out with what it deems is a reliable and useful standard of version control. Time will tell if they are right, but in the interest of being safe rather than sorry, GPO should also maintain the print records of the most important versions in legislation and other publications.

Archival online information is also a critical issue in "keeping America informed." One of the most damaging trends emerging in this digital age is the movement into completely digital formats that may or may not have the ability to be permanently archived. As technology changes, electronic information must change formatting many times. The process of formatting requires manpower and is subjected frequently to pragmatic decisions about what is worth formatting and what isn't worth the time. In this process electronic records may be lost or unreadable with the changes in technology. Print on the other hand has an enduring nature to it. Although it slowly deteriorates, under the right environment print media can last hundreds of years. Understandably there is no perfect archival process, but print has shown its worth in preserving information.

As Library of Congress librarian Sara Striner notes, "We librarians like copies, they are safe."^{1xx} Agreeably, print copies offer librarians and the citizenry a tangible record to keep. GPO's online switch has had the impact of reducing the number of copies actually printed. According to a recent,

November 2009 CRS report on congressional printing, since 1985 the page volume of hearings and committee prints has fallen 47.52 percent and 63.11 percent, respectively. This occurred as the size of government spending almost quadrupled and the volume of bills, resolutions, and amendments printed has increased 57.16 percent. This decrease in committee prints deprives many of those much needed “copies” from circulating around the capital and around the citizenry. Dishearteningly, this seems to be the norm around the capital, since interns and aides can access committee hearings and reports online at the touch of a button they feel no need to print more than the obligatory. The GPO is authorized to print and distribute a number of documents used by Congress. The size of the print runs depend on the document, but they range from 260 copies, in the case of Simple and Concurrent Resolutions, to 23,300 copies, in the case of the Daily Edition of the *Congressional Record*. Though this may save taxpayer money, we must step back and examine how this truly affects both the historical record of these events and the opportunity for the citizenry to remain informed.

In our interview, Tina Plottel noted that many government publications are now originating and being offered *only in electronic format*.^{lxxi} Even of greater concern is a new trend of publishing online outside of FDSys and the GPO. According to a recent summary by GPO, there has been a marked “change in agency dissemination from paper publications to posting on websites.”^{lxxii} The publication of these resources by agencies that lack the resources, ability, or desire to offer search-ability or archiving of this material, poses a great threat to our cumulative human knowledge. Although not in the realm of GPO’s authority, Congress and the Executive agencies need to truly examine the harm policies such as these are having on the American people’s access to reliable historical information. Finally, for those materials that GPO does obtain either electronically or in print, GPO should not veer from antiquated yet proven print methods for archival purposes.

Destruction of the People's Property

Over the Government Printing Office's long history, it has developed a notorious record regarding handling the People's property. Inventory control practices have led GPO to destroy tens of thousands of government publications in the name of cost savings. This policy not only harms access to print media formats of important information, it eliminates many of the tangible extracts of American History.

Unfortunately, GPO's insistence on profit, caused in part by a changing political landscape and in part due to statutory and fiscal restraints placed on GPO, has distorted its practices and caused its operations to deviate from the public good. The number of copies of documents that have been disposed of has been climbing in the past few years. In 2008, 196,572 copies of documents were disposed of; in 2011, that number grew to 262,947 copies. Since 2008, the GPO has disposed of nearly *1 million* copies of documents.^{lxxiii}

Disposal of government publications by GPO occurs in three steps. First, items are marked for disposal due to "limited general interest", obsolescence, or inventory reduction purposes. It is then sent to the original agency from which it was issued, to determine if they have use or need for it. Finally, if the agency rejects it, the Government Printing Office sells the product as scrap to be recycled, receiving as little as 5 cents per pound. This policy, even when followed, is detrimental to the public good as government information usable to millions of Americans is being disposed of for virtually no gain. Sure inventory on the shelves costs GPO quite a bit due to warehouse expenses, but the loss of cumulative knowledge to the American people is intangibly large as well. One way to rectify this is to eliminate the statutory ban on selling publications at markedly reduced prices based on high inventory or low demand, known as remaindering. If the GPO is willing to sell the publications as scrap for pennies, the same offer should be given to the citizens first. Not only would this prevent the knowledge from being lost in the depths of a paper recycling plant, this would also provide GPO with a larger revenue stream than they receive from scrap now.

However, the problem of document destruction is not rooted in the policy itself, for under the current procedures the right GPO mindset could maintain at least some level of respect for the people's property. The root of the destruction policy's abhorrence rests rather in the cavalier attitude of GPO officials toward government documents, treating them solely as the products of their business and disregarding the invaluable knowledge they hold. This

narrow business driven mind-set is best illustrated in the outrageous 1996 disposal of thousands of volumes of the people's property.

In 1996, the Superintendent of Documents, Wayne P. Kelley, in order to meet a budgetary deadline of September 30, authorized the immediate destruction of millions of pages of print material, bypassing the normal procedures of offering it back to the agency of origin. The Superintendent of Documents did this so that the loss would show up in Fiscal Year 1996 instead of future years when they would need to be charged to expense. The Superintendent claimed that he erroneously believed it was necessary to remove excess publications from GPO's storage so that the loss would be recognized in FY 1996. However, these actions were clearly against policy that had stood since at least 1984.

Among this destruction were copies of the Senate History, a multivolume set offering a detailed history of the United States Senate. According to a GAO investigation, 1,118 volumes of the first volume (125 pages each), 918 copies of the second volume (99 pages), 660 copies of the third volume (98 pages), and 492 copies of the final volume (89 pages), accumulating over 400,000 printed and bound pages accounting the Senate's long history were sold for scrap at two cents per pound. The materials that had cost an estimated \$83,000 to print were sold to a scrap company for a mere \$603.27. Even more atrocious is the reasoning by which these were destroyed. According to the GAO, "GPO inventory management staff kept... inventory based on the estimated demand... on a 10 year life cycle."^{lxxiv} First printed in 1988, the first volume thus only had two more years in its life cycle by GPO calculations. After that, GPO would discontinue offering it if there was low demand, or if demand spiked they would reprint, costing the taxpayers thousands of dollars. This calculation was not only callous; it could have been costly to the American taxpayer, and even more damaging to the state of distributed knowledge. Imagine how many people and libraries would have liked to purchase this Senate history at a discounted price.

In their 1997 report, the Government Accountability Office offered solutions that it deemed necessary to prevent a repeat of the many disposal discrepancies that GPO has committed in the past, most specifically the aforementioned 1996 disposal. They offered three concrete solutions to address the underlying causes of the disposal. First, they noted that GPO should be "Designating the Senate History Volumes for indefinite availability for sale," a specific response to Senator Robert Byrd's complaints regarding the disposal of volumes of a bound series on the Senate's history. The report

continued, noting that “the Public Printer and the Superintendent said that some publications, such as the Constitution and the Senate history volumes, should be kept indefinitely because of their historical significance.” It then suggested GPO adopt a formal method of identifying such documents. Second, GAO advised that GPO should strengthen its policies regarding offering items marked for disposal back to the original agency. Although this procedure had been in place, the Superintendent of Documents authorized his employees to overlook the provision for the sake of timeliness, so as to make a fiscal deadline. Finally, GAO recommended “aligning GPO’s procedure for considering holding costs of publications with its policy,”^{lxxv} This was a simple recommendation: That GPO should follow its own disposal guidelines.

Although each of these recommendations is valuable to improve GPO business practices, they fail to address the true, explicit cause of GPO’s misconduct: Running Government Printing as a business. Yes, GPO should have adhered to the procedures set by statute, and yes their accounting appears to have been geared towards short-term rather than long-term profits, but these solutions uphold the perspective that GPO should be beholden to some notion of profit. The Government Printing Office was first established, as all government agencies should be, to serve the public interest, either directly or indirectly. Any government agency that is not involved in serving the public interest is futile at best, corrupt at worst. Unfortunately, over the past few decades, the Government Printing Office has lost sight of its purpose. It has instead insisted on running like a business, where profit comes first, even at the expense of the public good and its declared mission.

The transformation of GPO from “the people’s printer” into a profit-driven entity has been gradual over the years, with constraints being placed from Congress and its political environment, forcing it into its current state. Starting in the 1970’s, public fondness for large government agencies started to wane, and there was a great push toward results-based political management. New Political Management (NPM) became the norm in managing the bureaucracy, placing emphasis on cost-effective strategies and market oriented models such as break-even and ratio analysis. In that part of the bureaucracy that sells things, no longer were the questions asked, what is best for the citizenry, but rather what will be most profitable? Although this drives competition in the private sector, when implemented in public printing, large conflicts of mission arise. Whereas in the private sector printing must be geared towards practices that gain market share and increase marginal gains,

Government printing has higher purposes such as equal access and opportunity.

In this regard, the Government Printing Office must not only reform its practices, it must alter its state of mind. Each and every employee should be reminded that they are working for the people, that their decisions should be geared towards the public, not profits. Their efforts are essential to an informed citizenry and a strong democracy. In this way, decisions about inventory would be made with the public's welfare in mind. The consideration should no longer be made based on profits, sales, or demand, but rather a diligent deliberation about what value maintaining the publication provides to the people. In order to make all of these changes, and for the culture to change within the GPO, Congress must clarify the Government Printing Office's role.

Though the GPO's actions may sometimes confuse the outside observer, it is a government institution that provides an important public service; its goal is *not* to maximize profits as does a private corporation. Until such a culture is re-instilled in the inner circles of GPO, government publication destruction will remain an issue subject solely to short-sighted cost-effectiveness and accounting gimmicks, costing the American taxpayer in permanently destroyed publications, the equivalent of permanently destroyed property.

Summary of Recommendations

The Government Printing Office is not yet beyond repair. We recently spoke with staff at the GPO's public relations office, and discussed a few things that were on their "wish list" of policy changes. They believed that the institution's name, the "Government Printing Office," was outdated in the current digital age and could use an update. They also identified a few requirements that imposed unnecessary burdens on the GPO: First, the Public Printer must be someone who is practiced in printing. This is arcane in this day and age; in order to manage the GPO, one doesn't necessarily need to be versed in book binding. Instead, they indicated that this requirement prevents potentially good candidates from Public Printer from ever being considered. Second, for every expenditure above \$50,000, the GPO has to get advanced approval from a member of Congress, which adds what they consider unnecessary bureaucracy to their operations.

Lastly, the GPO indicated that they were in desperate need of the authority and the funding to digitize previously printed documents. The majority of their digital operations are not funded directly but are instead funded through left over appropriations or reimbursed from a revolving fund. An independent appropriation for this work would help the GPO to expand its online content.

These reforms, however, don't go far enough. Although it faces a difficult printing environment and pressure to make a profit, GPO has accomplished remarkable feats in the past decades. Increasing openness, GPO has offered countless citizens a free source of invaluable government information and publications. Unfortunately GPO suffers from many problems with its current practices that could become permanent without immediate attention. In order to fulfill its responsibilities to the American citizenry it must implement the following reforms:

1. The Government Printing Office must reevaluate their print procurement procedures. The current system rewards corporate sector labor exploitation to create the façade of efficiency. Instituting a pay equity clause into government contracts to ensure equal pay is given for equal government work whether in the public or private sector will ensure that cost reductions received through work with private printers are due to efficiencies and best practices, not a government promoted labor race to the bottom.

2. The Joint Committee on Printing is in a unique time in history for overseeing the GPO. However, in order to truly oversee the Government Printing Office, the mostly inert JCP must start acting in a proactive manner. In order to do that, the independent annual appropriations for the JCP need to be reinstated. The JCP needs dedicated staff, so that it is not relying on the already overworked staff of the Committee on House Administration. Public hearings should be scheduled on more frequent intervals, at least once per year, and should provide a full assessment on GPO practices with knowledgeable public witnesses. The fiscal control the Appropriations Committee wields presently is not nearly enough oversight.
3. The Government Printing Office's General Sales Division stands in stark contrast to the online resources GPO provides free of charge. Publications are expensive due in part to low demand for print materials caused by online access and abysmal GPO promotion and marketing. First, GPO should extend its marketing and prominence of print sales in order to expand its sales beyond the online bookstore. Second, GPO should implement a need-based acquisition approach, allowing those of lower income levels who lack internet access to receive free or reduced prices on government publications. Implementing this would require a greater examination of internet access among various income levels, thereby determining the income levels eligible for free or reduced prices on publications. This would allow minorities, the poor, and the elderly to participate more fully in government decisions that impact us all.
4. Archival and Version Control issues related to digital media are vast and complicated. However, version control and archiving are exceedingly simple in print form. Thus, whenever possible, GPO should use the tested method of print on top of the newer method in order to provide version control and archiving copies, at least until a long-run solution is found for archiving digital documents and certifying version control. Furthermore, GPO, Congressional Leaders, and Executive Agencies need to reevaluate the uses of exclusive website posting by many agencies.
5. The Government Printing Office's destruction policy stems from the GPO's cavalier attitude toward the people's property. In order to avoid incidents like the mass destruction of 1996, the current business model of GPO must change. Objectives should be based on their role of "keeping America informed" not on the notion of profit. The reason GPO

exists is to serve the people. This should be ingrained in the culture at GPO, as they are first and foremost beholden to the people.

The Government Printing Office must reform its practices for it to truly meet the needs of the citizenry. Many of the aforementioned “fixes” are relatively small, a change in mindset and objectives, but others are much more substantial, costing time, effort, and Congressional authority and funds to fix the broken system. However, this is not the time to tape over the leak and call it fixed. GPO must understand that print as a medium has not fallen by the wayside. All that has changed is how GPO views and treats it. By administering the above changes and reforming printing practices that aren’t performing for the people, the Government Printing Office will be able to once again accomplish its objective of being the People’s Printer, version 2.0.

Imagining a 21st Century Government Printing Office

Though much of this report lays out a fundamental concern for the direction that the GPO has taken, we hold much optimism for the future of the GPO. This report should not be taken as a condemnation of online content in favor of print documents. That misses the point entirely. Instead, this report intends to highlight the benefits of each medium – online and print. But as it does so, it considers – and points out – the damage done by policies that prioritize profits and cost savings at the expense of “keeping America informed.” Michael Harrison, Democratic Chief Counsel to the Committee on House Administration said it best: “We’ll gain a lot by moving into electronic media in productivity enhancements there, but we’ll give up something too.” In discussing the shift away from print media, he said that we would be “throwing something irreplaceable away.”^{lxxvi}

For 150 years, the Government Printing Office has played an important role in propagating information about the government to Americans. It has provided citizens with a window into the workings of their government. For some Americans – namely those without access to the internet – the vision of the GPO as a purveyor of information is fading fast. The GPO has been, and could be, much more than it is today.

The free access to online government publications provides too great a benefit to the public not to pursue and expand it. But as the GPO modernizes, we should consider the consequences this has on the physical printing of government documents and, in turn, on those individuals who rely on print for their information. With the adaptations that the GPO makes to the computer age, it should take care to retain some of its roots in the form of physical printing. There is no reason in a society which strives to provide all of its citizens with access to essential government information that the two should be mutually exclusive.

Imagine a GPO that did absolutely everything it could to “keep America informed.” Such a GPO would open brick and mortar bookstores (or perhaps partner with the U.S. Postal Service to use existing infrastructure) across the country to give citizens easy access to their print publications. It would make those publications available at low rates, affordable by any citizen. It would make the text of legislation being considered in the Congress or of laws signed by the President easily available to any citizen who wanted it. It would maintain print records of every government document to preserve our history for future generations. And it would do all of these things both in print and online. There

is no doubt that this would mean their small budget would need to increase—
but would it not be worth it?

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