GPO

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Prepared Statement before the Committee on Rules and Administration United States Senate

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Oversight of the U.S. Government Publishing Office

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Chairwoman Klobuchar, Ranking Republican Member Fischer, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to update you on our work at the Government Publishing Office (GPO). On behalf of GPO's more than 1,600 craftspeople and professionals, I am pleased to be able to tell the Committee that GPO is in good shape and the Agency is poised for continued success.

As you know, GPO is unique in the legislative branch as it operates as business and its budget and resources are largely determined by the products it manufactures or procures for all three branches of the Federal government. This model has served GPO well in the past and is a strong foundation for its future.

My written testimony will provide a comprehensive discussion of GPO's operations since I last appeared before this committee, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

GPO's Finances and Achievements

Finances

While I am still awaiting the final results from GPO's outside audit firm, I expect that Fiscal Year 2023 will be another record year for GPO, likely exceeding last year's $1.1 billion in consolidated revenue.

Revenues grew across GPO's business units with its Security and Intelligent Documents (SID) division leading the way. SID's largest customer, the Department of State, asked that GPO supply 21.9 million passports in FY 2023 and our team met that enormously ambitious goal. SID also saw growth in its secure cards business, taking on a pilot project producing retiree and dependent cards for the Department of Defense, released detainee identification cards for the Bureau of Prisons, and credentials for Inspectors General across the Federal government.

We also saw strong performance in our Customer Services unit, where we contract with vendors in all 50 states to provide printing and related products and services to customers in all three branches of government. We approached nearly $500 million in revenue from this unit and saw a lot of growth in our work providing Federal agencies with solutions to digitize paper documents and we expect that growth to continue in the future.

Hiring

As most of you know, my single biggest challenge is making sure that GPO has a workforce ready to fulfill our obligations in the future. Currently about half of the Agency will be eligible to retire in the next four years and onboarding the next generation of talent is critical to GPO's ability to serve its customers in the future. That task is now harder as the kinds of industries where GPO traditionally recruited in the past, such as newspaper publishing and commercial printing, are shrinking as well, reducing the pool of potential recruits.

Despite those challenges, in fiscal year 2023 GPO onboarded 190 new teammates, 41 percent more than we did in the prior fiscal year. That brought GPO to 1,625 total personnel, a high watermark in headcount for recent years.

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Much of this growth came from our proactive efforts to bring new talent to GPO. We started a second cohort of our Recent Graduate Program, consisting of 34 new teammates, which attracts talented graduates from college and graduate schools to serve GPO in roles from IT to accounting to engineering and human capital. Likewise, we expanded our apprentice program to provide a path to educate people in our trades like pre-press and press operation.

Our most innovative program created a new role—production technician—to work in our SID operation. When faced with a critical shortage of journeyperson bookbinders, we developed this role to hire teammates with a demonstrated aptitude for working in a manufacturing environment and provide a three-year, on-the-job training opportunity. After working alongside experienced craftspeople, these teammates have learned the necessary skills to produce passports and secure identification documents and will become journeyperson bookbinders. Our production technicians are supporting our growth in secure document production while learning valuable skills for the future.

Innovating in Our Work Environment

In addition to our efforts to grow our team, GPO has adopted several innovations to improve our work environment and recruit top talent.

Telework and Remote Work

GPO's development of a thoughtful telework policy and early embrace of telework and remote work for certain roles has paid dividends as we grow our workforce. While about two-thirds of the Agency's teammates work in production at our facilities daily, many of our support roles work well in a remote environment.

For instance, as we exited the pandemic GPO started a trial to see if our regional Customer Services teams could operate without being tethered to a physical office. We saw revenue increase in that business unit, and we were eventually able to change that entire team to remote work and close physical offices across the country saving about a million dollars per year on rent and overhead costs.

Similarly, the availability of remote work has been a huge recruiting tool. We recently surveyed our first Recent Graduate cohort and nearly three quarters of those teammates identified the availability of telework and remote work as a key reason why they chose to join GPO.

It also enables GPO to recruit nationwide. If an individual is willing to work the core hours needed to support their customers, it doesn't matter where that person is located. Hiring teammates working remotely may even result in lower Agency costs as their primary location may have a lower locality pay rate than the DC area.

GPO has found this can even work for senior roles. GPO's Superintendent of Documents, the official who is GPO's chief liaison with the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) community, resides in Connecticut with his family, travels to DC when necessary, and visits our member FDLP libraries across the country. Similarly, we hired several librarians to work directly with FDLP libraries who live and work in the regions they serve.

Other Innovations

The adoption of new technologies is also helping us to expand the labor pool to fill core functions at GPO. For example, GPO's deployment of new digital ink jet printing technologies has dramatically reduced the amount of time needed to train GPO teammates to operate these clean and efficient presses.

Where it used to require several years for our Plant Operations staff to train an employee to run a traditional press, a GPO teammate can be trained to operate the digital ink jet presses in months. The innovations Plant Operations has put into place recently won recognition from the In-Plant Printing and Mailing Association which honored us with their 2023 Innovation and Best of Show Awards for our digital ink jet printing work.

And while GPO's Plant Operations maintains a more traditional schedule to support Congress's publishing needs, the Federal Register, and other similar products, we have used the production environment of SID to experiment and implement some important workplace innovations:

- We implemented a four-day work week with great success both at our DC and Stennis, MS SID facilities. Rather than working five eight-hour days, teammates work Monday through Thursday for 10 hours each day. This benefits our teammates who either get a three-day weekend or an opportunity for overtime on Friday, while the Agency gets the increased efficiency of running our equipment for longer with less wear and tear.

- We are currently in the final stages of working with our unions to standup a weekend shift at Stennis. Those teammates would work three 12-hour days Friday through Sunday, providing the Agency with additional SID production capacity.

These innovations provide our teammates with more flexibility while bolstering our ability to meet our customers' increasing requirements.

GPO's willingness to experiment and embrace new ways of working is one of the reasons why Forbes magazine named GPO one of the best places to work in America and one of America's best employers for veterans for the second year in a row.

GPO's Work for Congress

Chief among GPO's priorities is the work we perform for Congress. I often tell my team that while Congress is not our biggest customer, they are our most important. Every day, we produce Congressional Record pages, committee reports, and many other products for Congress. I'm excited to update you on a few of our initiatives for Congress, all of which will ultimately improve Congress' operations and how the legislature interacts with its constituents.

Congressionally Mandated Reports

Just under one year ago, Congress passed legislation directing GPO, working closely with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Congressional stakeholders, to make most of the reports mandated by Congress publicly available via GPO's ISO-certified trusted digital repository, GovInfo.gov.

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This is a hugely important initiative. I remember from my days as a committee staff person that so many of these reports were received, filed away, and archived at the end of the Congress with no one ever having looked at them. This legislation ends that cycle and will make these reports accessible both to staff and the public.

I am pleased to announce that GPO will meet our statutory deadline to make this system operational, and the first batch of reports will be made publicly available soon. Not only is the collection making its debut ahead of schedule, but it will have some important user-friendly features, such as enabling users to perform Browse by Topic searches and download a Table of Reports in multiple formats. I expect this collection to rapidly grow as executive branch agencies become more familiar with the law's requirements and submit more reports for publication.

This effort has been a long-time coming. GPO had been following the development of this legislation for several years and, shortly after enactment of the Access to Congressionally Mandated Reports Act as part of last year's National Defense Authorization Act, GPO began its efforts to meet the law's requirements.

In June, OMB Director Shalanda Young and I issued guidance to Federal agencies for submission of these reports and those agencies started submitting reports in October. As of the close of business on December 5, 127 reports have been submitted to GPO, and I expect more soon.

We will continue enhance access to Congressionally mandated reports and work with agencies as they endeavor to make more information available in open formats.

XPub Development

Since the 1980s, GPO has developed and maintained the software stack that Congress uses to print official documents. When Senators ask the Senate Office of Legislative Counsel to draft a bill, the PDF they receive is created by GPO's MicroComp composition engine. MicroComp is in use by the Secretary's office and the House as well.

Designed decades ago, to transition from hot-lead typesetting to digital composition, MicroComp was originally put into production in 1982. It has been at the end of its useful life for years now. While GPO has been able to adapt the program to support increased use of digital products, it fundamentally lacks support for features our customers want, such as color or modern document formats. All of us need something better.

Last fall, I announced that the replacement for MicroComp—XPub—reached the version 1.0 milestone after many years of development. XPub fully supports the structured data format used by the legislative branch and new formats and features, such as color. Users and the public alike will enjoy new features enabled by XPub, such as a responsive web display of bill and amendment text.

Unfortunately, like many version 1.0 products, we discovered some performance issues during testing with our customers. Some of this was due to the unique requirements of existing document and table formats; in other cases, we needed to fine-tune our own code.

Over the past year, we worked with our vendors and developers to improve our code stack and deliver a much-improved product. XPub is in user acceptance testing with our House and Senate customers and should deliver performance equal to or better than MicroComp.

We expect to deliver the production release of XPub, ready for use with bills, resolutions, and amendments, to our House and Senate users in the first half of 2024. Once delivered it may take some time to fully deploy as users will need to coordinate around congressional workloads and busy periods.

Redesigning Committee Reports and Hearings—Project Common Press

Ben Franklin—the Nation's first public printer—perfected his printing press design which became known as the Franklin Common Press, an example of which is on display at the Smithsonian. I chose this same designation for our project to redesign a basic document format for Congress—the committee report and hearing.

The current design for Congressional committee reports and hearings has been in place since GPO opened its doors in 1862. It uses a non-standard page size, small typefaces, limited heading styles, and only supports black type and greyscale images. Delivering the kinds of features our customers want—such as color—was largely cost prohibitive.

Today, we're at an inflection point—the development of XPub enables a level of flexibility with Congressional documents that we haven't had before, whether they are displayed digitally or in print; GPO has deployed digital inkjet presses capable of cost-effective printing on any size paper with a wide variety of features, including color; and Congress has demonstrated a willingness to reexamine long-standing practices to improve outcomes for lawmakers, staff, and the public.

Project Common Press is a bicameral, bipartisan effort to develop a new design template for committee reports and hearings. With the full support of the Joint Committee on Printing, GPO has started the focus group work of gathering our customer requirements for what a new format might look like. To date, we have discussed options with the JCP staff and House and Senate institutional officers. We have taken the feedback so far and are further refining our designs. Our next steps will be to gather feedback with committee staff and outside stakeholders, such as library and civic groups.

Given what we've seen so far, I expect those designs to include a transition to letter-size paper and include color elements. The goal is to deliver documents that are easier to read and understand no matter the format, print or digital.

At the end of this process, we plan on two deliverables: a style guide describing the look and feel of the documents and specifications—cascading style sheets (CSS)— for digital display. We'll then seek public comment on those documents before we finalize our designs.

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While this project is focused on the design of the documents, we also recognize that we need to improve the authoring process so that committee staff can focus on what they do best—content—and not worry about formatting. Accordingly, the next phase of XPub development will include improvements to support easier authoring of committee reports and hearings using familiar tools, such as Microsoft Word or web-based editors, while also providing a web-based mechanism to generate press-ready PDFs and machine-readable data files.

We are at the beginning of a long road to modernize a decades-old process. I believe the result will be better documents that support the legislative process and inform the public. I am excited for the outcome and thankful for this committee's continuing support.

A New Era for the FDLP

We are in a time of transition for the Federal Depository Library Program. In January 2022, I appointed a task force to examine the future of the FDLP, particularly the role of digital and tangible materials in the future. In December 2022, that task force recommended that GPO move to a digital FDLP model, and we began the process of imagining what that program would look like.

Given the task force's recommendation and the likelihood of future flat funding for the FDLP, we are accelerating the transition of the FDLP to a digital program. In line with trends in many libraries, we expect to significantly reduce the quantity and variety of tangible materials sent to libraries in the coming year.

We are currently in discussions with libraries over how GPO will implement those changes so that we can ensure that the remaining tangible copies of popular publications such as the Code of Federal Regulations are distributed in a way that ensures access to the greatest number of patrons across the country.

We must ensure that while we are reducing the distribution of tangible publications, we are giving our partner libraries and librarians the tools to help patrons find the information they need. GPO hosts a vast store of government information on the world's only ISO-certified trusted digital repository, GovInfo.gov, but we are also increasing our collaboration with agency partners who provide trusted online publications.

Likewise, we are also looking to assist depository libraries digitally convert their unique Federal publications to make them more available to those who might benefit from the information they contain.

Through this two-pronged approach—increased digitization of hard-to-find publications and strategic placement of tangible publications—we hope to provide the best possible access to Federal documents for our partner libraries and their patrons.

Other Matters of Interest to the Committee

Before closing, there are two other matters that I wish to address: GPO's efforts to explore the opportunities and challenges from emerging artificial intelligence (AI) technologies and GPO's package of suggested legislative changes.

Artificial Intelligence and Large Language Models

I know that we provide regular updates on our work to explore the opportunities presented by new AI technologies and believe it may be helpful to summarize those efforts here.

For the past several months, GPO has been developing an overall approach to AI technologies designed to enhance our ability to deliver services while mitigating any of the downstream risks often associated with the adoption of new technologies.

To date, we have created an AI use-case inventory on our website to disclose the applications through which we are currently employing AI technologies and issued an overall AI policy. That policy calls for the creation of an AI Advisory Committee and establishes that any proposed new uses of AI must be approved by GPO's Technical Change Control Board. It also requires that any proposed AI use must align with GPO's values and promote efficiency, increase productivity, and promote the safety of our employees and stakeholders.

In the months ahead, we hope to fill out our AI Advisory Committee, provide our staff with additional AI training opportunities, and pursue some modest proof-of-concept pilot programs with the committee's support.

GPO's Legislative Proposals

Earlier this year, GPO shared its proposals for changes to its governing statutes with this committee and your House counterpart. Those proposals have been stable from the beginning of my term and address two general areas: administrative issues affecting GPO's operations and changes to chapter 19 of title 44 to update the Agency's public information programs.

Administrative Matters

GPO has consistently requested certain changes to its title 44 authorities to improve its operations. These include:

- Updating title 44 to include digital publishing services where necessary;

- Allowing GPO to accept certain limited gifts in furtherance of its mission, similar to the Library of Congress;

- Lowering the threshold where the Agency may utilize simplified contracting procedures;

- Allowing the Director to make a limited number of non-competitive appointments to avoid reliance on the executive branch for schedule C appointments; and

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- ■ Providing leave carry-over authority for employees who are part of GPO's senior level service equivalent to that available to executive branch senior executive service employees.

Thematically, these changes are designed both to update GPO's operational authorities to reflect changes brought about by the transition from traditional to digital publishing, and to extend to GPO authorities that numerous Federal agencies enjoy. We believe each would contribute to our efforts to improve GPO's overall operational efficiency and productivity.

Updating GPO's Public Information Programs for the 21st Century

Just as important as changes to GPO's administrative authorities are our proposed updates to chapter 19 of title 44 which governs most of GPO's public information programs. This package of updates has been worked on with many of our FDLP partners, the library community in general, and GPO's Depository Library Council, and advisory group that represents the FDLP community.

These changes update key elements of GPO's authorities to include digital publications and establish the National Collection of United States Public Information. These are important improvements that both codify common practice in the FDLP and pave the way for new products and services for depository libraries and their patrons.

Enactment of these authorities will be a significant improvement to the FDLP and is long overdue.

Conclusion

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman and Ranking Member Fischer. I appreciate the opportunity to update the committee on GPO's recent progress. I look forward to any questions you may have.

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