



THE HONORABLE HUGH NATHANIAL HALPERN

Director

United States Government Publishing Office

**Prepared Testimony:
Hearing on Oversight of the Government
Publishing Office in the Digital-First Era**

Committee on House Administration

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U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

732 North Capitol Street, NW | Washington, DC 20401-0001

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Chairman Steil, Ranking Member Morelle, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Government Publishing Office and its 1,625 professionals and craftspeople. We provide publishing and manufacturing services for all three branches of Government and pride ourselves on delivering high-quality products under tight timeframes as we work to fulfill our vision of an *America Informed*.

This year marks several milestones for GPO. As America celebrates its 250th anniversary, GPO will celebrate its 165th year of operation and a century of producing the U.S. Passport.

GPO is a rare entity in the Federal government—we operate like a commercial enterprise, billing our customers for the products and services we provide. While I am still awaiting the final results of our audited financial statements, I anticipate that our revenue for FY 2025 will be approximately \$1.3 billion. The fact that we are an entity within the legislative branch only further distinguishes us from other agencies.

GPO's single largest product is the U.S. Passport, and we are proud of our partnership with the Department of State to produce what is today the world's most secure identity document. However, some of our most labor-intensive and important work is what we do for Congress, and I plan on spending most of my time today discussing that critical work.

Transitioning GPO to a Digital-First Era

When people think of GPO, they tend to think of us as a building filled with printing and binding equipment, and that is our focus. However, in fact, most of the work we do for Congress, along with the work to produce the Federal Register, is essentially document conversion.

We receive documents, typically accompanied by an electronic file of varying quality, and we need to convert them into easily accessible electronic files that can be distributed both digitally and in print. That's where our work is; it's not in the printed output.

A good example of this is that in the 1990s and early 2000s, the daily circulation of the Congressional Record was around 25,000 copies; today we produce a little over 1,000 printed copies and the rest of the demand is served digitally. Similarly, we used to produce around 32,000 copies of the Federal Register each day and we currently only print about 100 copies.

That change drove a change in the printing technologies we employ. Approximately six years ago, GPO transitioned most of the production of its daily publications from traditional offset presses to digital inkjet. This enables us to economically produce a significantly smaller number of printed copies while incorporating features our customers demand, such as color, without the high setup costs associated with traditional printing.

Our Current Workflow for Congress

For our work for Congress, the original paper document is the official version and we usually get an accompanying electronic file, which could be a text file, scanned PDF, Word file, or structured XML. Our job is to (1) ensure that the electronic file and official paper version match and (2) prepare the file for publishing by transforming it into our proprietary typesetting language.



When this workflow emerged in the 1980s, it was designed to produce printed output, represented by the PDF file we are all familiar with today. As a result, GPO's software stack was integrated into most official workflows, whether legislative drafting or the preparation of official documents by the Clerk.

PDF files are excellent representations of printed output, but they aren't well-suited for formatting information for modern devices, such as phones or tablets. Just think about the effort required to read legislative language in a PDF on a phone. It's not a great experience.

In the early 2000s, the legislative branch began to shift its process for creating official documents to use structured data files based on the extensible markup language—or XML—standard. This standard continues to evolve, and the legislative branch now has its own XML standard for legislative documents, known as United States Legislative Markup (USLM), which is being gradually implemented.

Unfortunately, GPO's current software stack has not modernized along with the legislative branch standards. Today, GPO still uses its original digital composition engine—known as MicroComp—and has “bolted on” additional functionality to deliver features like searchable files, web comparability, and other features requested by our legislative branch customers.

This means that much of our current workflow is transforming files from one format to another. Sometimes, that means translating an XML file into our typesetting formats and back again. In other cases, we take paper documents or Word files and transform them into structured data files. While we've developed some automated tools to facilitate these processes, many of them are nearing the end of their useful life and still require a significant amount of manual intervention.

XPub

GPO has a long-standing project to move from its legacy composition engine to a product that can “round-trip” XML files. We have named this product XPub, and it is based on a commercial XML publishing platform with significant customizations for our documents and environment. XPub has been in development for more than a decade, and we are near deployment of the initial modules.

We have designed the deployment of XPub around each class of publication. The first module that we hope to deploy into production this year will provide output for bills, resolutions, and amendments. Earlier this month we completed the first phase of user acceptance testing with the House Clerk and the Senate Secretary and hope to begin the second phase with a wider group of users this spring.

We are also moving forward with a limited rollout of another XPub product, known internally as XPub Horseshoe. This is our internal workflow system, which, when fully deployed, will transition our work from our current paper-based workflow to a fully electronic process. We will start running this system to produce the Federal Register this year in parallel with our existing process. As the workflow for the Federal Register is like the process for the Congressional Record, we expect that this product will also yield benefits for Congress soon.

XPub will bring countless benefits to GPO and our customers alike. We will be better able to ingest files that begin as Word or XML and work on them natively in XML. This will enhance the accuracy and efficiency of our work for Congress, ultimately yielding better results for our customers and end-users. It will also enable us to deliver better end products, such as a more robust web view of legislation.

This is a large and complex software development project. It has multiple dependencies, both inside GPO and with our customers. While I would have preferred that we were further along than we are now, the Committee should be fully assured that this is a priority for GPO and me personally, and we are continuing to make measurable progress.

Leveraging AI Technologies for Our Customers and the Public

Artificial Intelligence applications are the technology watchword of the moment. GPO has always been willing to adopt new technologies when we can show that they will deliver value for our stakeholders. We are continuing to evaluate internal AI and machine learning tools, like Microsoft CoPilot for general applications and Schematron for validating structured data files. We are currently testing concepts and applications using large language models (LLMs) that can:

- Automate the creation of contract terms to support acquisitions professionals;
- Build cataloging records of government publications to improve information management;
- Promote cybersecurity by enabling rapid detection and analysis of threats and anomalies; and
- Perform cost analysis of acquisition cost proposals.

Giving LLMs Access to Real Government Information

Our most tangible step with respect to AI to date has been the public preview of a Model Context Protocol (MCP) server for GovInfo, our trusted digital repository. The primary issue for most LLMs is that their access to training data is limited, and they may not provide the most accurate answers to questions because they are constrained by the data on which they were trained. Our MCP server will give most LLMs easy access to GovInfo's updated repository of government information, including congressional documents, court opinions, and countless other resources, all without requiring updated training.

GovInfo is a wealth of information for those looking for government information. GovInfo just celebrated its 15 billionth retrieval from the repository and its predecessors. It currently contains more than 3.2 million packages and over 21 million granules, each equivalent to an individual element, such as an item in the Congressional Record.

We believe that this approach is preferable to deploying our own LLM chatbot. Given the known issues surrounding LLM hallucinations, providing users with the ability to easily use their preferred model allows GPO to deliver this capability without compromising our commitment to delivering accurate government information.

Ensuring the Future of GPO's Workforce

Investing in new technology is not an end unto itself. New technology is merely a force multiplier for our team. And making sure we have a team that is ready to meet our customers' challenges is job one.

GPO's headcount is down significantly from its 1970s high point of nearly 8,500 people. Today, we are just over 1,600 teammates, which I believe is about the right size for our team.

However, GPO's workforce is older than the Federal average. The median age of a GPO teammate is 54 years old, while the Federal median is 47.

Our current strategic plan highlights GPO's challenge in maintaining and reinvigorating our team. We identified the age of our workforce and their proximity to retirement as a key test. At the time we developed the plan, we estimated that half of our team would be eligible to retire by 2027, making it one of the most critical challenges we faced.

The good news is that through the actions we have taken over the last several years, we have pushed back that date. Our current estimates indicate that we won't reach that point until 2030, and this does not account for further efforts to recruit the next generation of teammates. We've also seen that, on average, our teammates tend to stay about six years beyond their retirement eligibility.

Developing GPO's Next Generation

As I assumed leadership of GPO, it was clear that we could no longer rely on the same old practices to ensure our team was ready to tackle the challenges of the future. The general decline in the printing industry meant that we no longer had a ready supply of talent that was eager to join GPO. To ensure we have the right people for the future, we would need to be more creative in recruiting and developing our own talent.

We took some concrete steps to recruit and develop the next generation of GPO teammate:

- We restarted our apprentice program, which will add 25 journeypersons to our skilled trade positions, graduating 4 proofreaders, 2 bookbinders, 4 platemakers, and 4 press operators, with another 11 proofreaders set to graduate in February.
- We also shortened our apprenticeships from three years to two, with a greater emphasis on on-the-job training.
- We also created a path for production technicians, a brand-new on-the-job training program for individuals with an aptitude for working in a manufacturing environment. They are learning alongside our journeyperson bookbinders, making passports and Smart Cards, and we've graduated 30 with another 46 still in the program.
- For our professionals, we have had three recent graduate classes to bring talented recent grads into GPO as specialists in IT, contracting, personnel, printing, and other disciplines. To date, 43 people have graduated from the program, and an additional 31 are expected to complete it within the next year. We will consider

running future recent graduate programs depending on our staffing needs in these areas.

- We have also sought to find exceptional talent from other areas of the Federal government, and are extremely fortunate to have been able to hire Julie Balutis, formerly the Director of Grants Policy and Management at IMLS, to serve as our new Managing Director of Library Services and Content Management (LSCM), where she will help us fulfill our goal of a Digital-First Federal Depository Library Program.

That isn't to say that we are without challenges. We have particular crafts where GPO has a majority of teammates who are already eligible to retire. For instance, among our teammates who staff the proofroom, more than half are eligible to retire today. They are very much the backbone of our document conversion work. While they all deserve to enjoy the retirement they earned, we need to ensure that we have enough people to continue this important work.

We're utilizing as many tools as possible to address that critical need. I have already mentioned our apprentices. We have also revised our candidate screening process to broaden our search for individuals with the right skills and to prioritize the use of work sample assessments, helping ensure we hire the most skilled journeypersons. This process has been working, and we hope to have the proofroom fully staffed by the end of the calendar year.

Following the Path to GPO's Future

As Congress has evolved, so has GPO. We have adopted new technologies to meet our customers' operational tempo and demands for more flexible products. We do our best to hold down costs while maintaining our level of service. Because GPO's production work for Congress and our Federal Register customers is so closely intertwined with their work, all these changes are the proverbial engine upgrade while the plane is in flight.

This presents us with a particularly difficult set of challenges as we prepare to wrap up the execution of our current strategic plan and set up the plan for the next five years. We need to continue—and in some cases accelerate—our changes while maintaining our capability to address our customers' reliance on existing workflows.

To continue our efforts at improvement, we must be willing to engage on two levels: (1) the "micro" level, looking for improvements in even our most basic workflows, and (2) the "macro" level, asking ourselves the important questions about how GPO is structured and whether that makes sense for our next decade.

Attacking Calcified Processes

As examples of recent improvements in our workflows, I have two successful examples to share. Both focus on processing bills and other legislative measures.

As this Committee is aware, GPO has been experiencing an ongoing problem with processing bills in a timely manner. Much of this stems from the volume of introduced legislative measures. Between the 112th and 118th Congresses, there was about a

50 percent increase in the number of measures, reaching over 23,000. GPO was consistently behind in processing bills, with a backlog exceeding 1,000 measures at times. These measures are processed by a small team of highly trained proofreaders, all experts in the intricacies of legislative language.

Our efforts were primarily focused on prioritizing our workflow, asking customers to highlight the most important measures, and attending to those first. We addressed the others as time allowed. This understandably left many of the Members upset at the length of time it was taking us to process their introduced measures.

Managing Administrative Overhead

As we analyzed the bill data from the 118th Congress, we learned that while the number of bills and the processing time continued to climb, the number of pages we had to proofread decreased. We discovered that the driver behind the increased processing time was the fixed amount of time required for each measure to perform basic administrative tasks—such as printing, logging the measure into our tracking and accounting systems, and other overhead activities. This type of work takes approximately 10 minutes per measure and was performed during our second and third shifts, when our bill end team was at work. The more bills we had, the longer this step took, regardless of the number of pages that needed to be read.

By moving work on this administrative overhead to the day shift, we were able to free up resources to focus on proofing and processing the actual measures themselves when our experts were working. As a result, we have been able to keep the average number of measures pending in the bill end under 300 for much of 2025.

Processing Bills Without Proofreading

As a result of the important work of the Committee and its Modernization and Innovation Subcommittee, led by Chair Bice and Ranking Member Torres, we began a program in partnership with the Clerk to allow House Members to “opt out” of proofreading for their introduced measures.

Under this program, if a measure is prepared by the House Office of Legislative Counsel and a Member opts to forego proofreading at the time they introduce the measure through the E-Hopper, GPO will process the measure without our traditional review, doing cursory checks for completeness. We will then move the measure into production, making it available online and printing the usual number of copies in our digital print center.

While it is still in the early days, we have seen success in shortening our production cycle for those measures. We can process them as a batch in as little as 20 minutes, compared to the three to seven days required for measures prepared through our traditional process. For those measures, they cost about \$4-6 per page less than those processed traditionally.

Since this pilot began, we have processed a total of 1,426 bills, and of those measures, 144 or 9 percent, have opted to forego proofreading. While we believe that GPO’s traditional process yields a higher-quality end product, we are pleased to provide an alternative option for Members who want faster availability for their introduced measures and are willing to accept the risks associated with skipping the proofreading process.

These two examples illustrate the benefits of identifying existing bottlenecks and taking straightforward, common-sense steps to alleviate them. We plan to explore other processes that may benefit from a similar treatment.

Beyond processing bills, the Committee has also encouraged our efforts to streamline administrative processes, promote operational efficiencies, and save time for our customers. You supported our work to transition away from the time-consuming and laborious paper-based congressional detail billing process which frequently led to billing backlogs exceeding a year in many instances. That transition, initiated in the House during the last Congress, has now been completed on the Senate side and it is saving GPO employees and Committee staff hundreds of hours a year while ensuring integrity to GPO's billing for the 58 GPO teammates serving as details on Capitol Hill.

Focusing on Fundamentals

GPO continues to evolve to meet the needs of its customers. Unfortunately, its statutes limit our ability to make fundamental changes.

Title 44 was written for the age of print. It makes assumptions about the way GPO operates that haven't been true for decades. Sometimes, we have been able to squeeze modern practices into the liminal spaces between the letter of the law and modern practice. In other cases, we have relied on the guidance of the Joint Committee on Printing to help us navigate the statutory inconsistencies and conserve taxpayer resources.

Like an old house, we know that the bones are good: GPO serves its customers government-wide; we provide the public with free access to government information; and we avoid duplication and waste wherever possible. But also, we know that the systems need a comprehensive overhaul. For instance, when we began providing free digital access to Government information in the 1990s, we simply "bolted on" a new statute without revising any of the underlying provisions.

While this approach works for a while—and in GPO's case, a long while—it's not a substitute for taking a reasoned approach toward fixing GPO's statutes. Every Congress since I've been at GPO, we have supplied our oversight committees with a variety of proposed legislative changes that could put GPO on a more secure footing in the future. These are small things, such as adding "publishing" to the list of services that GPO can provide, and big things, like a complete rewrite of the provisions governing the Federal Depository Library, so that the statute reflects our "digital-first" present.

From my perspective, I am in favor of legislative changes that update our statutes to reflect current practice and are flexible enough for the future to allow GPO to meet the needs of our customers without requiring changes to the law. I believe that our prior legislative submissions meet those tests, and I would welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee to see them enacted.

Conclusion

Over the past six years, I have had the pleasure of serving as GPO's Director, and I have witnessed the skill and dedication of our team. They come to work each day, committed to delivering for our customers, whether they are a Member of Congress, a librarian, or a passport holder. My job, both now and in the future, is to make sure that they have the tools they need to help us realize our vision of an *America Informed*. Thank you for your support of our team's efforts.

A great deal has changed since I first testified before the Committee on House Administration in March of 2020. Back then GPO was reporting approximately 34 million monthly information retrievals on GovInfo—today we get more than 165 million per month. We were also producing about 15 million annual passports for the State Department—in FY 2026 we are shooting for 27 million. And while change is inevitable, it is critical for GPO that we look to the future with a mindset for continuous improvement.

Chairman Steil, Ranking Member Morelle, and Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee today, and to work with all of you. This kind of oversight work helps us tell our story and learn where we can be better.

I know that I have covered a lot of ground, and there are likely topics that I have not addressed in my statement that may interest you. I stand ready to answer any questions that you may have and appreciate the opportunity.

Hugh Nathaniel Halpern, *GPO Director*

Hugh Nathaniel Halpern is the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) Director, the agency's chief executive officer. The agency is responsible for publishing and printing information for the three branches of the Federal Government. Halpern is the 28th person to lead GPO since the agency opened its doors for business on March 4, 1861, the same day Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as the 16th President of the United States. President Donald Trump nominated Halpern to be GPO Director on October 17, 2019, and the U.S. Senate confirmed him on December 4, 2019.

Biography

Prior to coming to GPO, Halpern held a succession of leadership positions during his 30 years on Capitol Hill. He served as the Director of Floor Operations for the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. In that role, Halpern was the highest-ranking floor staffer in the House and served as Speaker Paul Ryan's Chief Advisor on all procedural matters. He managed the daily floor operations of the House, served as the liaison to all leadership offices, and oversaw legislative interactions between The White House, House and Senate. In 2018, he received the John W. McCormack Award of Excellence, the highest award given to a staff member in the House. The award recognizes a lifetime of bipartisan service to the House.

In addition to his position in the Speaker's Office, Halpern has more than a decade of experience serving on the senior leadership staff. He has a proven track record of successfully leading teams to achieve results.

During his career, he served half a dozen different committees in both policy development and procedural roles. During his 11 years on the House Committee on Rules, Halpern served as Staff Director leading the management and terms of debate on the House floor. In 2001, he was named General Counsel by Chairman Mike Oxley for the newly established House Committee on Financial Services. During his tenure, the committee provided legislation addressing terrorist financing and money laundering, improving investor confidence in the wake of the Enron and WorldCom scandals and granting consumers important new tools to fight identity theft. During the 1990s, Halpern served on the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, where he handled a variety of legislative issues, including automobile safety, insurance, FTC consumer protection and tobacco regulation. Halpern began his career in Congress as an intern for Rep. E.G. "Bud" Shuster in 1987.

Halpern served a number of temporary positions during his time on Capitol Hill. He was the Parliamentarian to the First Select Committee on Homeland Security, which created the Department of Homeland Security, General Counsel to the Select Committee to investigate the voting irregularities of August 2, 2007, and Assistant Parliamentarian to the 2008, 2012, and 2016 Republican National Conventions.

A native of Hollidaysburg, PA, Halpern received bachelor's and master's degrees in Political Science from American University in 1991 and 1992, respectively. He also received a law degree from George Mason University in 1997. Halpern has been included in Roll Call's list of 50 most powerful Congressional staffers 14 times and featured in a National Journal profile as one of "The New Power Players" on Capitol Hill.



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