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PRINTING
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Office Of Congressional And Public Affairs

202-512-1991

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Office Of Congressional, Legislative And Public Affairs 202-512-1991

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No. 00-24

December 8, 2000

GPO CONVENES WORKING GROUP ON PERMANENT PUBLIC ACCESS POLICY

For the past year, the Government Printing Office (GPO) has convened a series of high-level meetings involving congressional and executive branch officials, to develop long-term strategies that will provide permanent public access to Federal Government information made available over the Internet. Led by Public Printer Michael F. DiMario and Superintendent of Documents Francis J. Buckley, Jr., the meetings represent one of the Government's leading initiatives to ensure that Federal information remains accessible to the public once it is made available online.

There are thousands of Federal Government Web sites today, making millions of Government documents available to the public electronically. Yet documents frequently disappear from the Web just as fast as they appear, resulting in a growing amount of lost and often irretrievable information. Federal census, agricultural, energy, environmental, and budget information are just some of the categories from which online information products have disappeared in recent years. The files are no longer available for a variety of reasons—they may have been updated or revised, or they may have become outdated or simply removed. Regardless of the reason, however, the result is the same: an electronic document that is no longer available. The problem is becoming so pervasive that many observers in the library and Government information communities are beginning to speculate that the current era will one day be known as an enormous "black hole" in the availability of Government information.

Speaking at the first meeting of the Permanent Public Access (PPA) Working Group in September 1999, Public Printer DiMario said there is "a pressing need to examine permanent public access to Government information in this time when computer systems encounter problems with viruses, overloaded servers, and other challenges. The public must be assured that Government information will be available, electronically, on a long-basis."

Since the initial meeting of the PPA Working Group, there have been 4 sessions involving key officials in the Federal information community, including representatives from GPO, congressional staff, the Library of Congress, the National Archives and Records

Administration, the National Agricultural Library, the National Library of Medicine, the Energy Department, the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS), the Defense Technical Information Center, and other agencies. Representatives of the library and Government information user communities have also attended.

The goals of the PPA Working Group include facilitating discussion among stakeholders engaged in digital archiving research or applications; developing and publicizing "best practices" for digital archiving that will facilitate cooperation across agency and organizational boundaries; and identifying "at risk" electronic information and developing collaborative solutions or partnerships to ensure permanent public accessibility.

GPO's interest in the permanent public access initiative reflects its longstanding experience in providing such access through its Federal Depository Library Program. In addition, a permanent public access policy governs the operation of **GPO Access**, GPO's acclaimed Internet information service (at <http://www.access.gpo.gov>). Documents made available through **GPO Access** remain permanently available either on GPO's own servers or through partnerships established between GPO and other information provider organizations. Nearly 200,000 titles are available to the public today via **GPO Access**, with nearly 26 million publications downloaded by the public every month.

The PPA Working Group meetings have already resulted in several tangible outcomes. A Web site dedicated to the issue of permanent public access has been established by GPO (at www.gpo.gov/ppa). In May 2000, a new partnership was formed between GPO and the National Library of Medicine to provide permanent access to online versions of the *Index Medicus*, Medical Subject Headings, and the Library's Audiovisuals Catalog; and in November 2000 a GPO partnership with NCLIS was formed to cover all significant publications on the NCLIS Web site, including annual reports and other reports and studies of the Commission.

Additional meetings will be scheduled for 2001. For more information on GPO permanent public access initiative, please contact Ms. Sandy Morton-Schwalb at 202-512-1114, or e-mail to smorton-schwalb@gpo.gov.

(Self-Mailer)



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