

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public Law 101-509 (November 5, 1990) created the Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress. The committee's function is to advise Congress and the archivist of the United States on the management and preservation of the records of Congress. The committee is required to submit two reports, of which this is the first. Under the statute, this report is to include an assessment of "*(i) the effect any transfer of records of the National Archives and Records Administration from facilities located in Washington, D.C., to any location outside of Washington, D.C., shall have on the management and preservation of the records of Congress; and (ii) [to present] a five year plan for the management and preservation of the records of Congress.*" A second report, due by December 31, 1995, will provide a four-year update.

Impact of Archives II

The 1994 opening of the new "Archives II" building in College Park, Maryland will provide a unique opportunity for the Center for Legislative Archives to acquire within the existing main building much-needed office space, a large reference facility in the East Reading Room, and additional stack areas. The textual records of Congress will remain in the main Archives building while photographic, cartographic, audio, film, and video records will be transferred to College Park.

Five-Year Plan for the Records of Congress at the National Archives

Preservation of Textual Records

The Advisory Committee agrees that physical preservation of the records of Congress should remain the highest priority of the Center for Legislative Archives for the next five years. Preservation efforts will focus on completing the microfilming of the records of the first

14 Congresses (1789-1817) and determining the need for additional laboratory conservation treatment of these vital documents.

The Center reports it will continue the basic preservation activity of flattening records, placing them in acid-free folders, and replacing unstable copies. The Center will begin conservation treatment of House territorial records and senators' credentials.

The Advisory Committee recommends that one conservator and one conservator aide, both dedicated to legislative records, be added to the staff of the Document Conservation Branch.

Electronic Records

The Advisory Committee urges that the Center for Legislative Archives, in coordination with the Center for Electronic Records, the clerk of the House, and the secretary of the Senate, stay abreast of developments in new automated recordkeeping systems and new electronic formats of records used by Congress. The Center plans to identify and preserve permanently valuable electronic records for future use by committees and researchers, and to survey records, such as the Government Printing Office's electronic print files, to identify and preserve permanently valuable records under that agency's control.

Holdings Development

By promoting the transfer of records and expanding the range of records to be accessioned, the Center can counteract the problem of decentralized documentation of Congress while increasing scholarly interest in the legislative branch. The Center plans selectively to solicit significant donated historical materials related to Congress. These materials may include the records of party and independent caucuses, scholars' research files, oral history interviews, and finding aids of other institutions' congressional holdings.

Reference

The Advisory Committee recognizes that the Center's plans to merge its reference and projects staffs will improve reference service and facilitate congressional loans. The Center will establish a legislative research room in what is now the East Reading Room, and will develop computerized reference logs and new finding aids to facilitate research in congressional materials.

Public Programs

By disseminating the rich documentary history within its holdings, the Center will endeavor to promote a better understanding of Congress and representative democracy. The creation of the new position of congressional historian and formation of its congressional

services and outreach staffs will provide enhanced services to Congress and students of congressional history as well as significant educational materials for teachers. The Center will produce teaching packets for classroom use of documents featuring some of the historically valuable records of Congress. To encourage the study of Congress, the Center will also support the efforts of the House and Senate historical offices and other congressional repositories to sponsor exhibitions, publications, conferences, teacher-training institutes, and other public forums.

Resource Requirements

Most of the proposals outlined in this report can be initiated with the existing staff and funding resources available to the Center for Legislative Archives. As the programs develop, there will be an increasing need for additional resources, both from congressional appropriations and the private sector. Funding from private-sector sources will support educational activities such as exhibitions, teacher-training institutes, and documentary publications. The Advisory Committee has asked the Center to prepare for its review a detailed analysis of its resource needs.