

NAME OF SYSTEM:

Congressional Information Network

ORIGINATOR:

Legislative Reference Service

Library of Congress

Washington, D.C. 20540

OBJECTIVE. To develop and operate a document storage and dissemination system capable of providing the members of Congress with current information as to the status of legislation, committee hearings, the budget, and other significant matters.

BACKGROUND. The United States Congress, as it enters the decade of the 1970's, is faced with legislative demands of extraordinary complexity. Each congressional member must function effectively in his several distinctive roles of office. These activities include that of legislator, rendering decisions of national and often world-wide importance; of prime representative of his State or district; and of helper to constituents having specific problems or complaints. The ability of the Congressmen and their committees to effectively discharge their duties is often hindered by the great number of routine tasks to be performed, the great variety of information to be acquired, and the diverse issues to be evaluated.

The stresses upon the members and their staffs have been augmented by the effects of the information explosion. The profusion of books, articles, analytical reports, and miscellany threatens to overwhelm the present information handling centers. Traditional procedures for acquiring, indexing, abstracting, storing, processing, retrieving, and disseminating urgent information do not effectively meet present demands. Thus, the Congressman must evaluate new methods, techniques, and tools to assist him in the performance of his legislative and administrative tasks. Steady advances in information handling technology over the past 20 years now demonstrate the proven potential of technology to better support the Congress in a number of application areas.

The following example is but a beginning in a series of automated information processing programs aimed at enhancing the chamber, committee, and individual member performance.

THE NEW METHOD. The Library of Congress, Legislative Reference Service (LRS), is now providing more responsive support to Congressional members and committees in the information sciences. The first application of the system for the Congress was the "Digest of Public General Bills," which summarizes the essential features of all public bills and resolutions. Essential identifying information on each piece of legislation includes the name of sponsor(s), the date introduced, the bill number, and the committee to which assigned, plus synoptic and indexing information. This information is placed in the disk storage unit of an IBM 360, Model 40 computer through use of a remote ATS (administrative terminal system) text processing system. Six IBM Model 2741 remote terminal selectric typewriters are used for insertion, recall, and editing of the "Bill Digest" information. The Digest is produced cumulatively every two months, with supplements produced every two weeks. Each of these publications is printed by photo-offset methods by the Government Printing Office (GPO).

Each month a "Legislative Status Report" encompassing digests and status information on 200 to 300 major bills is produced, using the same ATS remote terminal and storage system. The 11 by 15 inch computer output continuous paper form is reduced to an 8½ by 11 inch master copy through use of a Xerox 2400 Mark IV duplicator. The necessary copies for distribution to the Congress and other interested agencies and individuals are produced by a Multilith duplicator. The ability of the computer to add data elements without regard to sequence and to rapidly change obsolete material have proven to be particularly useful in this application.

The Congressional Information Network is also used for producing and disseminating the periodic "Congressional Committee Cal-

endars." Additionally, bibliographic reports in the form of a weekly list of about 10 significant citations is disseminated on a selective basis to individuals whose areas of subject matter interest match the indexing terms covering the contents of the selected citations. About 190 personnel in the Legislative Branch are currently using this service.

Currently there are 29 active remote ATS terminals involved in the overall system. Of these, 23 are located in LRS and two are located with congressional committees.

REMARKS. As the complexity and diversity of the tasks confronting the Congress increase, the importance of utilizing every pos-

sible means of acquiring and analyzing selected priority information before making decisions will become increasingly critical. The role of electronic technology will assume broader proportions as the legislator strives to fulfill his responsibilities and is willing to rely upon support from such systems.

The above-cited examples are only the start of a greater utilization of the benefits of computer and associated technologies. For example, during 1971, Data Central—a powerful, full-text, on-line retrieval system—will be used for retrieval of bill digests and legislative status information. The bill digest data base is already available in the computer as a by-product of the current "Bill Digest" production.

CONGRESSIONAL INFORMATION NETWORK

