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FACT SHEET
NATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR THE PROMOTION OF HISTORY
Dr. Page Putnam Miller 544-2422

ISSUE: Passage of S. 905, a bill to restore the independence of the National Archives by separating it from the General Services Administration.

CONTACT PERSON IN THE SENATE: Ira Shapiro (224-2627), Chief Counsel of Minority staff for the Committee on Governmental Affairs should be contacted by Senators wishing to become co-sponsors.

BACKGROUND

The National Archives Act, passed in 1934, established the National Archives as an independent agency mandated with the task of collecting the scattered records of our documentary heritage and creating a system for the orderly accumulation of such records over time. The Archivist of the United States was appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. Fifteen years later, however, the National Archives was incorporated into the newly created General Services Administration. In the post-war period a strong movement for federal reorganization to increase government efficiency and eliminate the excessive number of separate federal agencies led to the creation of one agency to manage the various housekeeping functions of the Federal Government. The Hoover Commission's recommendations on reorganization culminated in the passage of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 which transferred the National Archives to the General Services Administration. Thomas Eagleton recently noted that "However sound the concept or compelling policies, the arrangement has been troubled for at least two decades." He further stressed that "A brief history of the relationship of NARS and GSA presents a picture of perennial, nagging problems related to the low priority status of NARS within GSA, and the lack of independence."

On June 24, 1982 Senators Eagleton (D-MO) and Charles Mathias (R-MD) introduced a bill which would separate NARS from the GSA. On July 29, Jack Brooks (D-TX) introduced a similar bill in the House. However, neither bill was reported out of their respective subcommittee during the 97th Congress.

KEY POINTS

- The basic missions of NARS and GSA are incompatible. In 1963 Senator Mathias expressed strong reservations about the "concept that GSA should become the guardian of history as well as the custodian of washrooms, storerooms, and workrooms." It is too much to expect that many GSA administrators would have the time or the inclination or background to develop a sensitive understanding of the needs and objectives of the National Archives.
- NARS' lack of authority over budget, program priorities and personnel management has led to the devastation of morale among archival employees and to the perception both inside and outside of Government that the National Archives is being poorly managed.
- GSA has in recent years rarely sought adequate funding for NARS. Instead of promoting adequate appropriations for NARS with the Office of Management and Budget, GSA has minimized NARS' requests. GSA's principles of profit and loss are difficult to apply to the work of archivists and records managers, who deal with people and materials of intangible value in labor intensive work. As a result NARS' budget has suffered over the years while those of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian have prospered by comparison.
- As long as NARS is under the authority of GSA there is the danger of politicizing certain archival activities. The most disturbing case of political pressure on the Archivist involved the issuance of a questionable deed of

- The cost to administer the Archives as an independent agency could well be less than it presently costs to administer NARS as a part of the GSA.
- There are many precedents in the federal government for small independent agencies.

CURRENT SITUATION

Last spring, Glenn English (D-OK), chair of the House Subcommittee with oversight responsibility for NARS held hearings to examine the impact of budget cuts and other problems. Following the hearings English noted that he had "become increasingly frustrated with the lack of responsiveness of GSA officials to the needs of the Archives." The specific difficulties to which English referred included a GSA decision on at least one senior level personnel change at the Archives without consultation with the Archivist, GSA's apparent renegeing on an agreement that the Public Buildings Service would pay for some \$2.7 million in long needed repairs at the Archives building, GSA initiating organizational changes that might strip the Archives of certain basic functions, and GSA imposed employment ceilings on NARS.

An urgent need for NARS independence manifested itself in January, 1983, as the Reagan Administration took preliminary steps to replace the current Archivist without cause and simply to make the office available to another individual. From available information it seemed that the proposed appointee, Richard F. Starr, had recently been relieved of his post as Ambassador to the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction Conference in Vienna and had been selected on political, and not professional grounds. Many serious difficulties can arise from placing issues that require expert archival judgments in the hands of short term political appointees.

On March 24, Eagleton (D-MO) and Mathias (R-MD) again introduced legislation to separate NARS from GSA. S. 905 would secure autonomy over budget and program priorities for the Archives. There are currently 15 sponsors and cosponsors for S. 905. Approximately 40 are needed to give this legislation the backing necessary to move it through the committee process and bring it to a vote on the floor. The cosponsors include: Kassebaum (R-KS), Sarbanes (D-MD), Cranston (D-CA), Sasser (D-TN), Levin (D-MI), Nunn (D-GA), Cohen (R-ME), Danforth (R-MO), Moynihan (D-NY), Jackson (D-WA), Durenberger (R-MN), Glenn (D-OH), and Hatfield (R-OR). Additional cosponsors as of May 16: Charles Percy (R-IL), Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Lawton Chiles (D-FL), Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), Ernest Hollings (D-SC), Paula Hawkins (R-FL), and Edward Kennedy (D-MA), John Meicher (D-MT), James Exon (D-NB), Mark Andrews (R-ND).