Statement of Hugh Nathanial Halpern
Nominee for Director of the Government Publishing Office

Thank you, Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and Members of the committee. I am pleased to appear before you as President Trump's nominee to be the next Director of the Government Publishing Office (GPO).

GPO's official history extends back to the beginning of the Civil War, but its roots extend all the way back to the founding of the Republic, counting Benjamin Franklin as one of its progenitors. In the years since, GPO has grown with our country and modernized as new technology has become available. A few years ago, Congress changed GPO's name from the "Printing Office" to the "Publishing Office" to reflect its mission of making government information more available in an increasingly paperless world.

The same conditions that led to GPO's name change continue to accelerate. And that is why I believe it is important for GPO's leadership to reflect the needs of its customers and the vision I want to share with you today.

My Background

I come to this role as a long-time customer of GPO and an advocate for making legislative data more available.

I was a committee staffer for most of my career. In many of those roles, I was the staff person ultimately responsible for the committee's document production. In my career I oversaw the production of thousands of committee reports, hundreds of which I drafted myself. While I was at the Committee on Financial Services, I managed a team of committee staff and GPO detailees that produced the printed copies of the committee's hearing records. At one point, I even learned GPO's "locator code" typesetting system so I could have greater control over the production of the committee's documents.

I also was largely responsible for the effort in the 112th Congress to update the rules and practice of the House to allow electronic files to have the same status as documents printed by GPO. This was a huge change for a paper-driven institution and there was some resistance from well-meaning institutionalists along the way. Today, it's hard to imagine the House being able to operate at its current tempo without that simple but important change.

That change has also led to other improvements that few could have imagined when we began. For instance:

- In the 113th Congress, the House launched the Committee Repository, a digital archive that provides a central location to find public committee data and protect it against loss when the leadership of the House or a committee changes.

- The House is continuing development of an electronic system to show the impacts of amendments on bills and bills on the law. At a recent conference, the staff from the Clerk of the House announced their intention to have this system deployed to all House offices, something that will fundamentally improve the way the House legislates in the future.
- The Bulk Data Task Force (BDTF), initially established to provide bulk legislative data to the public so that they may use it in their own applications, has grown into an important forum comprised of representatives from the House, the Senate, the Library of Congress, and GPO to discuss the future of legislative data and the best way to make it widely available. The BDTF also regularly consults with outside groups interested in the availability of robust legislative data sets.

All of these projects have benefitted from the hard work and talents of staff from the House, the Senate, and GPO.

The Challenges of Working With GPO

When Congress established GPO, they chartered it as an agency of the legislative branch largely because Congress was to be its primary customer. Today, while Congress is not its largest customer, it remains one of its most important. The women and men of GPO literally work around the clock to produce congressional documents, meeting tight deadlines with perfect copy day after day.

However, during my time as a House staffer, I observed one immutable fact: it is really hard to work with GPO.

As a committee staffer, you generally have two choices to produce documents for GPO:

1. You can learn to use a series of proprietary software tools that are reaching their end of life and often fail under stress; or
2. You can essentially bundle up electronic and paper documents and ship them off to GPO where a human being will stitch it all together and manually retype anything not available electronically.

Neither of these options are particularly good for ensuring the rapid and accurate production of congressional documents, particularly in formats other than print.

We must reduce this friction between GPO and its customers. Otherwise, the customer will find alternatives, either by using other organizations to produce their documents or by ending the production of certain documents altogether. Either of those options threaten GPO's overall mission of keeping America informed.

GPO's customers should be able to use commercial, off-the-shelf tools to prepare documents for publication. GPO should have the expertise to help their customers fine-tune those tools to maintain quality and speed up the workflow between the customer and GPO. And that partnership should reinforce GPO's role as the permanent and

authoritative source for government information through continued investment in the govinfo online system and the Federal Depository Library Program.

Some of these problems are driven by the design of the documents themselves. For instance, the design of a committee report has *never* changed since the Congress started printing them. That design was intended to hold down costs by keeping documents short through the use of small fonts and tight tracking, rather than emphasizing readability. Each time technology changed, GPO designed their process to reproduce that same output. As GPO stands on the precipice of its next major technological change as it launches its XPub composition system, maybe it's time to take a fresh look at how congressional documents are designed.

For instance, the United Kingdom Parliament updated its document design years ago. They use modern designs and typefaces, print their documents on standard sized paper, and even use color where appropriate. The results are documents that are produced using commercial tools and readable across a wide variety of media, including paper and screens of various sizes.

We should do the same. GPO would need to partner with this committee and its House counterpart to begin the process of modernizing congressional documents. Those changes would likely require changes to the Joint Committee on Printing regulations and even some statutory changes to title 44 of the United States Code. But if this committee is willing, I believe that taking a fresh look at the design and production of congressional documents will yield benefits to Congress and the public alike.

The Challenges Facing GPO as an Organization

However, none of this will be possible if GPO's future is not secure. As one of the few agencies that works on a cost-recovery model, GPO is dependent on its customers for revenue. The annual congressional appropriation is only a small portion of its annual income, the rest coming from its other lines of business.

The good news is that GPO is on solid financial footing. Thru the 11-months ended August 2019, GPO fully recovered its operating costs and also generated sufficient cash from operations to fund future capital investments. GPO's total revenue in FY19 (as of October 2019) increased by more than 6 percent over the same period in FY18.

But it also has notable challenges looming on the horizon. GPO's main campus is comprised of buildings dating back to the beginning of the last century with significant maintenance and upkeep issues. Those buildings still have areas that are underutilized because GPO's workforce is smaller than it was a few years ago. And that workforce is nearing an inflection point as more than one-third of GPO's employees will be eligible to retire at the end of FY 2021.

When you combine those factors with the uncertainty underlying GPO's traditional business model, it's no wonder people question GPO's long-term viability.

But I prefer to look at those challenges as opportunities to put GPO on a solid footing for the future. They will provide the impetus to update the business model, to reduce friction with GPO's customers, and to adjust the workforce to meet GPO's customers' needs.

Should I be confirmed, that work will build on the work of my predecessors. They have put the agency on a path of sustainability, but much remains to be done. And I look forward to creating strong partnerships to get there — labor and management, Congress and GPO, GPO and its customers.

Conclusion

I believe that GPO has all the elements to be successful in the future: a talented workforce, strong technical and production capabilities, and a commitment to its core mission, keeping American informed.

Should I be confirmed, my commitment to this committee is that I will do my best to harness GPO's strengths and put it on a path that leads to long-term security. My hope is that this committee shares my vision for how to get there and will be a partner as we proceed.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions you may have.