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Statement of

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Comptroller General of the United States

Before the

Legislation and National Security Subcommittee

House Committee on Government Operations

on

H.R. 2518 and H.R. 2519, Bills That Would Eliminate

or Modify Certain Requirements for

Agency Reports to the Congress

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

We are pleased to be here today to discuss H.R. 2518, a bill to discontinue or amend certain requirements for executive agency reports to the Congress and H.R. 2519, a bill to discontinue or amend certain requirements for GAO reports to the Congress. Currently, based on our inventory, there are approximately 3,000 congressionally mandated recurring reporting requirements. According to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), H.R. 2518 would eliminate or modify about 236 of these

requirements and save the government from \$10 to \$12 million annually. H.R. 2519 would eliminate about 4 requirements. This represents about 8 percent of the existing universe of requirements.

Reports reduction has been and continues to be an important concern of the General Accounting Office, and we support efforts to reduce unnecessary paperwork in the federal government. Accordingly, we support the intent of H.R. 2518 and have, in fact, recommended eliminating some of these reports in the past. However, certain provisions of the bill may limit necessary congressional oversight for certain programs, including the Congress' ability to determine if programs are operating within the law. For example, sections 105 and 115 would eliminate requirements for important financial information on special trust funds and statements of liabilities to be sent to the Treasury and the Congress. Likewise, section 202 would alter requirements for information on pension plans and other financial commitments of the U.S. Government.

In our November 5, 1985, letter to you concerning H.R. 2518, we provided additional detail on these and several other reporting requirements whose repeal or modification, in our opinion, could deprive the Congress of data which may be useful in conducting its oversight responsibilities. In addition, we have provided you with information identifying committees with jurisdiction over the reporting requirements named in H.R. 2518 for your use in reviewing these requirements with them.

We also support the intent of H.R. 2519. In a recent report to your committee, Recurring Reports to the Congress--Efforts to Eliminate or Modify Certain Reporting Requirements (GAO/AFMD-85-49, April 1, 1985,) we made recommendations similar to those contained in H.R. 2519. In addition, we suggest that your committee consider eliminating another reporting requirement which is currently not in the bill. This involves eliminating a requirement in the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended, that the Comptroller General report biennially on the transfer of federal surplus property.

Since September 1980, we have issued three reports to the Congress under this act. Also, federal agencies' inspectors general periodically audits the act's utilization and donation programs. Based on our experiences, and because of audit coverage by the inspectors general, we believe that GAO's biennial evaluation and reporting requirement is no longer necessary. However, we would include the personal property utilization and donation programs in our routine audit work or in response to a specific congressional request. We provided additional detail on this in our October 30, 1985, letter to you.

GAO's interest in reporting requirements stems largely from the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, which assigned the Comptroller General responsibility for monitoring the various

reporting requirements of the Congress and its committees. To fulfill this mandate, we have compiled and published a comprehensive inventory of reporting requirements entitled Requirements for Recurring Reports to the Congress (GAO/AFMD-85-4).

This inventory and our report entitled A Systematic Management Approach is Needed for Congressional Reporting Requirements (PAD-82-12, November 25, 1981), show that the number of reporting requirements levied by the Congress has grown from 1,556 in 1980 to our current estimate of 3,000. These reports provide the Congress with a major source of information. The Congress and its committees depend on the reports to carry out their legislative and oversight responsibilities. However, we support efforts to reduce unneeded or duplicate reporting. As you know, on July 29, 1982, we testified before this committee and endorsed the intent of a similar bill, H.R. 6005. That bill was signed into law as the Congressional Reports Elimination Act of 1982 (Public Law 97-375).

The proposed legislation, like the 1980 and the 1982 acts, which discontinued or modified 150 recurring reporting requirements, is designed to eliminate unnecessary requirements for executive agencies' reports to the Congress and to promote cost savings as well as reduce paperwork burdens.

We also believe that if the utility of congressional reports were monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis, the Congress could more easily identify unneeded reports that could be eliminated. We further believe that the value of reporting requirements should be assessed during the legislative initiation and reauthorization processes. That is, drafters of legislation could compare the potential benefit of a new reporting requirement with the increased paperwork and the related cost that would be generated by the requirement. We encourage drafters of legislation to determine what information is already available in order to avoid creating new requirements, unnecessarily.

Again, we support H.R. 2518 and H.R. 2519 and urge their passage, with the exceptions we have highlighted today and discussed in more detail in letters to you. We believe that their passage will help to further reduce federal paperwork and the reporting burden on government agencies. This concludes my prepared statement. We would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

