

COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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JUN 19 1979

Dr. Louis F. Polk  
Chairman  
U.S. Metric Board  
1015 North Lynn Street  
Suite 600  
Arlington, Virginia 22209

Dear Dr. Polk:

I am writing this letter to supplement our discussions, and those between our staffs, about some of the conclusions in our report entitled "Getting a Better Understanding of the Metric System--Implications if Adopted by the United States."

One of the main points in the report is that under present law conversion to the metric system is to be voluntary. The decision whether and when to convert is to be made by those affected. We did not conclude, nor even suggest, that those who wish to convert should wait until the Congress decides whether to have either the customary or metric system as the predominant system. To so read the report misconstrues it. What the report does suggest (on page 56) is that certain factors, such as actions by various sectors of society and a misunderstanding of the national policy, tend to foster metrication for the entire Nation. These factors detract from the voluntary aspect of conversion and lead to a dual system of measurement--metric and customary, neither of which predominate. A dual system for any length of time is undesirable. The report stated that the Congress should decide whether to continue the present policy or whether it should be changed.

For have we suggested that the Board's role be a passive one. The Board's role as we see it is to plan for and coordinate conversion, and to educate the public about metrication. The Board also may be able to facilitate the process of converting, as long as it does not advocate the conversion. It should give positive guidance to those who voluntarily choose to convert to metric.

I have also become aware of a number of statements attributed to us emphasizing the high cost of converting to

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metric. Our report suggested that the cost would be significant. This statement was based on limited cost data that was available to us and on the input from representatives from a wide spectrum of organizations throughout the country. The report also stated that the total cost of metrication is undeterminable in spite of various estimates that have been cited. These estimates vary widely and often are not based on detailed analyses of the factors involved. They generally are low or high depending on the conversion experience of those providing these figures and their position on converting or not converting to the metric system.

I understand your General Counsel expressed an interest in reviewing the legal analyses that were prepared during our development of the report, and any of our letters or comments on the subject that were written after issuance of the report. Accordingly, we will provide him with material which explains our legal conclusions concerning the national policy.

I hope you will find the foregoing useful and responsive to questions you have raised concerning possible misconceptions about our report.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) ELMER B. STAATS

Comptroller General  
of the United States