

The Hoover Commissions and Federal Recordkeeping

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National Archives

IN the annals of public administration in the United States the position of the two Hoover Commissions is not unique. They were only the latest in a long series of commissions set up to find ways of improving the organization of the executive branch of the Government. They did, however, have more popular support and greater success in the achievement of their objectives than any of their predecessors.

The earliest of the modern attempts to reorganize the executive branch was undertaken by the Cockrell Committee, created by the Senate, which from 1887 to 1889 made a study of business methods in the executive departments. A few years later came the Dockery-Cockrell Commission, established jointly by the House of Representatives and the Senate to look into the functioning of the executive departments, other Federal agencies, and the laws under which they worked. This was followed by the Keep Commission, acting for the President, which from 1905 to 1909 investigated departmental methods. President Taft, in 1910, acting with congressional authorization, created the President's Commission on Economy and Efficiency, which functioned until 1913.² In 1921 the House and the Senate sponsored a Joint Committee on Reorganization of Government Departments and passed the important Budget and Accounting Act. Once again, in 1936-37, two committees operated in the same area, the Byrd Committee for the Senate and the President's Committee on Administrative Management, headed by Louis Brownlow.

During the New Deal era one of the main reorganization efforts was to reduce the large and increasing number of independent agencies that reported directly to the President. President Roosevelt, with congressional authorization, made a number of consolida-

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² These four earlier investigations have been the subject of articles in the *American Archivist*, 21: 159-192, 277-303 (Apr., July, 1958).

tions of such agencies. Several of them, under the act of April 3, 1939, were transferred to the permanent departments or merged with larger agencies, such as the Federal Security Administration and Federal Works Administration; others were grouped in the new Executive Office of the President.

All the special investigative bodies mentioned above performed important work and made constructive recommendations to Congress or the President. Yet for the most part they were not outstandingly successful in achieving their aims. There were several reasons for this. Some of the commissions were partisan in the political sense; others were so completely creatures of Congress that their findings were not received sympathetically in the executive branch; still others were sponsored purely by the executive branch and failed of approval by Congress. Over and above these shortcomings there was the inherent opposition of bureaucratic "pressure groups" with a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo*.

In the course of their work several of these commissions before 1912 made important recommendations concerning the record-keeping practices of Government departments. After 1912 no governmentwide investigations of recordkeeping were made until the mid-1930's, when the long-awaited National Archives had been established and had begun to make its influence felt in this field.

The first governmentwide survey of Federal records carried out by the National Archives, in 1935-37, revealed chaotic recordkeeping methods in many agencies, both permanent and temporary. Records had been created without restraint and with no attempt to follow uniform and consistent filing patterns, to eliminate duplication, or to consolidate and systematize. Overall planning and supervision were sadly lacking.³ Perplexing problems therefore faced the National Archives when it tried to carry out its basic task of selecting the records considered worthy of permanent retention and reporting all others to Congress for disposal.

It seemed clear that, in order to keep such problems from continuing to plague the National Archives indefinitely, corrective measures had to be taken. The higher administrative levels of agencies and departments had to be induced to interest themselves in efficient record management.

The advent of World War II redoubled the need for effective record management programs, as emergency agencies again began to proliferate and to create voluminous records, with no organized plan of disposition and no restraint upon quantity. In this difficult

³ Oliver W. Holmes, "The National Archives at a Turn in the Road," in *American Archivist*, 12: 344 (Oct. 1949).

situation the National Archives abandoned the traditionally conservative and passive attitude of archival institutions and plunged into the field of current record administration. As the central agency with major responsibility for the welfare of Government records, it took the initiative in encouraging and collaborating with other agencies in the establishment of record administration programs. Agencies were given advice and assistance by the National Archives to the full extent of its resources, and many of them staffed their record management units with personnel trained in the Archives.⁴

Records accumulated at a greatly accelerated rate during the war years. The need to keep this accumulation from becoming unmanageable put the initial emphasis of most agency record administration programs on record disposition. In some of the larger agencies it was found that the establishment of intermediate record depositories, or record centers, using low-cost space and equipment, provided an efficient system for storing and servicing inactive records and those not needed for permanent documentation of the agency's work.⁵

The National Archives, for its part, endeavored to simplify record disposal procedures. To this end it devised the record disposal schedule, the use of which was authorized by legislation passed by Congress in 1943. An outgrowth of this device, the general schedule, was authorized in 1945 by an amendment to the Records Disposal Act.⁶ The use of scheduling procedures and the employment of record management techniques in the war agencies facilitated the orderly retirement of vast quantities of wartime records.

The importance of the record management field was recognized by Executive Order 9784 of September 25, 1946, which required all agencies of the executive branch to conduct "active continuing programs for the effective management and disposition" of their records. This order gave recognition and increased authority to the activities of the National Archives in the field of record management. But it also recognized the similar interests of the Bureau of the Budget, and it placed primary responsibility for such programs on the individual agencies themselves. It did not, therefore, help to centralize and strengthen responsibility for the record management function. Many agencies tried to comply with the order, but many others failed to do so or gave only token compliance.⁷

⁴ *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Archivist of the United States*, 1948-49, p. 1.

⁵ The average annual rate of increase was 1 million cubic feet. *Report of the Archivist*, 1948-49, p. 1, 3.

⁶ *Report of the Archivist*, 1948-49, p. 2; 1947-48, p. 4.

⁷ *Report of the Archivist*, 1947-48, p. 7; Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, *Task Force Report on Records Management*, p. 31 (Washington, 1949), hereafter cited as *First Task Force Report*.

THE FIRST HOOVER COMMISSION

Soon after World War II it was felt in many quarters that a new effort should be made to rationalize the organization of the Federal Government, particularly the executive branch. Since the activities of the Government, for various reasons, showed no sign of shrinking to their pre-1939 levels and annual budgets remained very large, almost the only hope of effecting economies lay in the promotion of greater efficiency in the operations of the Government through a reshaping of its organizational structure.

On July 7, 1947, President Truman approved the Lodge-Brown Act, unanimously passed by the Eightieth Congress, which established a Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government. The Commission's assignment was far reaching. It was authorized to study and investigate the existing organization and methods of operation of all departments, bureaus, agencies, offices, and other instrumentalities of the executive branch to determine what changes were necessary, in its opinion, to stimulate economy, efficiency, and improved service in the transaction of public business. Its aims were, in brief, to try to limit expenditures to the least amount consistent with the efficient performance of essential services and functions, to eliminate duplication and overlapping of activities, and to consolidate services and activities of a similar nature. The Commission was to report, not to the Eightieth Congress, but to the Eighty-first, thus putting its findings as much as possible outside the area of current political debate.⁸

Having in mind the weaknesses of earlier commissions on reorganization, the framers of this act strove to give it a broad, bipartisan basis of support. The Commission consisted of 12 members — named by the President, the President *pro tem* of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House. Each of these was required to name two men from public and two from private life, and none of these pairs could be from only one of the major political parties. The resultant membership was equally divided, therefore, between Government officials and private citizens and equally divided on party lines.⁹

President Truman presided at the first meeting of the Commission, held at the White House on September 29, 1947, until the Commission elected its own officials. Former President Hoover, who had been appointed by Speaker Martin, was elected chairman,

⁸ 61 Stat. 246.

⁹ Neil MacNeil and Harold W. Metz, *The Hoover Report, 1953-1955*, p. 9 (New York, 1956).

and Dean Acheson Vice-Chairman.¹⁰ Sidney A. Mitchell was chosen Executive Director. To finance its operations, the Commission obtained an appropriation of about \$1,900,000 from Congress.¹¹

The Commission adopted a new technique in its fact-gathering work. It set up some 24 research groups, which it called task forces, to explore almost every field of governmental activity. To serve in the task forces it selected more than 300 outstanding experts in the various technical fields studied, most of whom served without compensation. Once organized, the task forces were given general "guide lines" to follow and instructed to proceed independently in their researches.¹²

The administration of Government records was not one of the items on the original agenda of the Commission,¹³ but the possibility of having it deal with that problem soon suggested itself to a number of people. Emmett J. Leahy, executive director of the National Records Management Council and a former member of the National Archives staff, was the first to recognize the opportunity; and, as early as the beginning of January 1948, he discussed with the Commission's staff the ways in which economies could be introduced into the handling of Government records.¹⁴ Before the end of the month he had submitted a detailed proposal to the Commission outlining the scope of the record management problem in the Federal Government as he saw it and suggesting ways and means to deal with it.¹⁵

Early in March 1948 the Assistant Archivist of the United States, Wayne C. Grover, also wrote the Commission. He likewise stressed

¹⁰ Citizens Committee for the Hoover Report, *Status of the Hoover Report, 1949-1953*, 1:4 (Washington, 1953). Mr. Hoover's interest in the reorganization of the Federal Government can be traced back almost three decades. As early as 1919 he expressed himself in favor of a "rigorous reorganization of [Federal] . . . administrative machinery," which he thought could be accomplished by an extragovernmental group of public-spirited citizens organized for the purpose. Hoover to Judge William A. Glasgow, Paris, Apr. 12, 1919, in Records of the Sugar Equalization Board, Record Group 6, National Archives. Hereafter the symbol RG is used for Record Group and NA for National Archives.

¹¹ *Status, Hoover Report*, 1:4. The Commission, fittingly, ended with a small surplus, which was returned to the Treasury.

¹² *Status, Hoover Report*, 1:4.

¹³ Twenty-one of the eventual 24 task forces were set up before the Commission decided to study Federal records. Ray Harvey and others, *Achievements in Federal Reorganization*, p. 10 (Washington, Citizens Committee for the Hoover Report, 1955).

¹⁴ Herbert J. Miller, memorandum for files, Jan. 6, 1947 [*sic*], in Executive Director's files—Correspondence, Records of the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, 1947-49, RG 264, NA (hereafter cited as First Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA).

¹⁵ Leahy to Herbert J. Miller, undated 7-page memorandum in folder "Records Management—Misc. 1," box 89, First Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

the possibility of achieving significant savings in this field and proposed that a record management task force resolve the following main questions:

1. Where did staff responsibility for record management lie in the Federal Government?
2. What were the respective responsibilities of staff agencies and of the operating agencies?
3. Should there be a new General Records Act?
4. What was the proper role of the intermediate record storage center?¹⁶

It was believed at the National Archives that a study of these questions would draw attention to the problem and perhaps lead to some sound suggestions for future action. It was not supposed that it would really have much other practical effect.¹⁷

The outcome of these proposals was that the Hoover Commission on April 12, 1948, entered into a contract with the National Records Management Council whereby the latter agreed to make a "task force" study of the record management problems of the Federal Government.¹⁸ Mr. Leahy himself directed the work of the task force; and associated with him as expert consultants were Herbert E. Angel, Director of Office Methods, Navy Department; Edward B. Wilber, of the Department of State; Dr. Grover, Acting Archivist of the United States; and Frank M. Root, Archivist of the Westinghouse Electric Corp.¹⁹

The records of the task force contain minutes of only one meeting. This first meeting was held shortly after the contract was made, and it resulted in tentative recommendations favoring a new Public Records Act and the establishment of a Federal record center. It is known that later meetings of the task force were held, on an informal basis, with the results of the discussions not recorded. The writing of the task force report was undertaken by Mr. Leahy himself; it embodied his own views and was expressed in his own lan-

¹⁶ Pearson Winslow, memorandum, Mar. 12, 1948, in folder "Records Management," box 62, First Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

¹⁷ Holmes, in *American Archivist*, 12: 347; Wayne C. Grover, "Recent Developments in Federal Archival Activities," *ibid.*, 14: 8 (Jan. 1951).

¹⁸ Folder, "Records Management—Progress," box 89, First Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA. The contractor's fee was \$8,250.

¹⁹ Mr. Leahy, after serving on the staff of the National Archives, had transferred during World War II to the Navy Department, where he was responsible for setting up a large and successful record management program and became Director of Office Methods. Subsequently he was head of the microfilm division of Remington Rand. In 1948 he became executive director of the National Records Management Council, a nonprofit organization sponsored by the Social Science Research Council. Dr. Grover, upon his appointment as Archivist of the United States in June 1948, relinquished his post on the task force to Robert H. Bahmer, Assistant Archivist of the United States.

guage, but all members of the task force concurred in its major points.²⁰

Task Force Report on Record Management

The completed report of the Records Management Task Force was submitted by Mr. Leahy to the Commission on October 14, 1948.²¹ The Leahy Report, as it came to be known, first drew attention to the magnitude of the Federal record problem, citing the fantastic quantities of records being created and maintained, the essential causes of this condition, and the excessive burden that the cost of these operations imposed on the taxpayer. Its estimates indicated that there were about 18½ million cubic feet of Federal records in existence and that the Government spent more than \$1,200,000,000 annually on recordmaking and recordkeeping.²²

Then followed Mr. Leahy's recommendations — partly organizational and partly legislative — for the solution of the problem.²³ In summary, these were:

1. That a new bureau, to be known as the Federal Records Administration, be created, incorporating the existing National Archives establishment and existing noncurrent record depositories of the Department of Defense and other agencies, and having the responsibility of establishing and operating Federal record centers and developing and promoting improvements and economies in current recordkeeping on a governmentwide scale.
2. That a "Federal Records Management Act" be passed to give comprehensive legal authority for the creation, preservation, management, and disposal of the records of the United States Government.
3. That a qualified record management officer be appointed in each department and agency to administer a "minimum" record program, which would be subject to a degree of regulation and standardization by the new Federal Records Administration.

The report went on to justify these recommendations with detailed arguments and a wealth of statistics and to present estimates of the savings that might reasonably be expected if the various recommendations were put into effect. It concluded with a draft of a proposed bill for a Federal Records Administration Act to fulfill the second of its major recommendations.

One of the outstanding and pressing needs of the moment, as Mr. Leahy saw it, although he did not refer to it specifically in the task

²⁰ Folder "Minutes," box 89, First Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA; interview with Robert H. Bahmer.

²¹ Leahy to Sidney Mitchell, Oct. 15, 1948, in folder "Records Management," box 62, First Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

²² *First Task Force Report*, p. 2, 4.

²³ *First Task Force Report*, p. 7-12.

force report, was the need to integrate the record management programs of the three military departments. Unification of the services had been accompanied by the creation of the Department of the Air Force, and Leahy believed it imperative that the Air Force should be forestalled from breaking away from the Army to set up its own record facilities, creating three programs where two had been before. He believed that the ultimate success of the Commission's record management program might depend on effective coordination in this field, because of its sheer size and the large number of record facilities already in operation. With Department of Defense assistance, he believed that the Hoover Commission could, without legislation, achieve such a unified program before making its report to Congress. It could thus point with pride to this accomplishment, which would add great weight to the Commission's overall record management proposals.²⁴ The Commission appears to have felt, however, that it could not, or should not, exert such pressure as Mr. Leahy proposed. Nothing in its files suggests that it tried to interfere with the Department of Defense or the Department of the Air Force in their record administration activities.

The Hoover Commission did not consider itself bound by the recommendations of its task forces. Its job was to work them, or such parts of them as it found useful, into an orderly pattern of reorganization for the executive branch as a whole. To avoid political repercussions, all of its findings were kept secret until after the presidential election of 1948.²⁵ It was not until November 11, 1948, that Mr. Hoover in a press conference outlined some of the preliminary findings of the Commission. Public release of the task force reports began in late November and December of 1948; that of the Leahy group was published in January 1949.

It appears that the Leahy Report's strong emphasis on the proposed Federal Records Administration as a service agency led the Hoover Commission logically to associate it with other general service and housekeeping agencies of the Government. Consequently, it dealt with the Leahy recommendations in its report on an Office of General Services, which it submitted to Congress on February 12, 1949. In this document it accepted most of the language of the three basic recommendations of the task force. It went one step further, however, and advocated incorporating the Federal Records Administration (or "Records Management Bureau," in its terminology) in the new Office of General Services, which it envisaged as

²⁴ Leahy to Sidney Mitchell, June 10, 1948, and to Pearson Winslow, July 12, 1948, in folder "Records Management," box 62, First Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

²⁵ *Status, Hoover Report*, 1:132.

an agency to handle matters of plant, equipment, supplies, and the like for the Government as a whole.

The unanimous acceptance of the Leahy task force proposals appeared to bode well for them. Unlike the reports of some of the other task forces, which evoked all sorts of minority opinions from Commission members, there was no dissent from the report of the task force on record management. Agreeably impressed by this attitude, Mr. Leahy expressed his gratification and that of the National Records Management Council to Mr. Hoover and added the hope that Congress would give his handiwork an equally good reception. To help along its prospects Leahy promised to do his best, with the assistance of his organization, to rally support for the Commission's recommendations. This would be beyond the requirements of his contract but "distinctly in the public interest."²⁶

On June 12, 1949, the Commission disbanded, leaving to Congress the responsibility for carrying its recommendations into effect as it saw fit.

The Leahy Report was anything but perfect. From the very moment of its appearance it became a subject of controversy, some quite heated, among the professionals in the fields of record administration and archives. About the only thing on which all sides could see eye to eye was Mr. Leahy's statement of the basic problem and his emphasis upon its magnitude and importance. Everyone recognized that there was a need to coordinate the management of the great and growing quantities of Federal records and to develop programs that would effect improvement and economy in record management. Whether the solution proposed by Mr. Leahy was the best method of achieving these ends was, however, open to question.

The report had many shortcomings in style and form. Its pattern of organization, calling for the discussion of each recommendation in at least three separate places, resulted in much duplication and overlapping. Furthermore, it made very heavy use of statistical data on the costs of personnel, space, and equipment, the volume of records accumulated, and the like; but it offered no explanation of how the statistics were gathered or estimated.

The report was also criticized for its relatively narrow scope. It concentrated on quantitative problems and physical matters, such as warehouse space for the storage of noncurrent records, types of filing cabinets and their most efficient utilization, file-room space and layout, and laborsaving equipment. All of these related only

²⁶ Leahy to Herbert Hoover, Mar. 8, 1949, and to Sidney Mitchell, June 16, 1949, in folder "Records Management," box 62, First Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

to the physical handling and control of records and to managerial and clerical techniques. These matters, needless to say, represented important cost-reduction factors — the phase of record administration that demanded most immediate attention. But the problem really began with the creation and use of records, with their quality and content, the quality of record personnel, and the need for more effective recordmaking. These aspects were scarcely touched upon by the report. Such a one-sided emphasis, therefore, tended to give a distorted picture of the function of record administration in the Federal Government.²⁷

The report, moreover, was not basically creative but rather promotional. As its critics pointed out, it merely took certain established principles and techniques of record management, developed and practiced by the National Archives and the major executive departments over a number of years, and proposed that they be applied more comprehensively and under centralized authority. Mr. Leahy presented his case in such a way as to imply that if this were done immediate and tangible savings were sure to result. The report was a vehicle for dramatizing the problem and Mr. Leahy's own specific solution. It was a so-called "action" document, intended more to "sell" the Hoover Commission on Mr. Leahy's idea than to study the problem objectively and impartially.²⁸

The reports, both Mr. Leahy's and the Commission's, aimed at centralization of record management activities. This was in striking contrast to the reports on other management problems (such as personnel management, procurement, and auditing), all of which strongly recommended the greatest possible *decentralization* of responsibility for the conduct of these activities. There were serious doubts whether recordkeeping, record using, and record retirement activities of the departments and agencies could be centrally directed and controlled in the same way that the use of common items of supply or units of space could be. Some observers thought it unwise to put a great deal of responsibility for the management of all current and semicurrent records in the hands of an "overall" agency having no responsibility for the execution of the substantive programs from which the records were derived.²⁹

²⁷ John D. Millett to Sidney Mitchell, Oct. 26, 1948, in folder "Records Management — Misc. 1," box 89, First Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA; Comments of Helen Chatfield, Dec. 17, 1948, in case file 049-106, part 1, Records of the National Archives and Records Service, RG 64, NA.

²⁸ Interagency Records Administration Conference, *The Report of the Hoover Commission on Records Management* (Report of meeting of Mar. 18, 1949), p. 3.

²⁹ Comments by Director, Roosevelt Library [Herman Kahn]; Robert H. Bahmer to Senator McClellan, June 28, 1949 — both in case file 049-106, part 2, RG 64, NA.

The report also drew criticism because it failed to suggest any alternatives to its proposed solution. It stated categorically that the proposed Federal Records Administration was "the only practical and operationally sound organization" to do the job.³⁰ Nor was there any alternative provision in case the Federal Records Administration did not become a component of the Department of General Administration or Office of General Services.³¹ It was not long, indeed, before alternatives were suggested, particularly by members of the National Archives staff. One suggestion proposed the setting up of a separate Federal Records Administration to manage the record administration program and the record centers but not the National Archives, which would remain unchanged in status. Another envisaged the enlargement of the Archivist's duties to include those of the proposed Federal Records Administrator, in the hope that this would ensure the continued dominance of the archival rather than the managerial and clerical point of view.³²

The question of the most appropriate organization for implementing Mr. Leahy's recommendations was indeed serious, particularly to the National Archives; for the future of the agency was intimately bound up with the decisions to be taken in that regard. Within the National Archives there were many conflicting opinions as to the proper course of action. There was fear that the incorporation of the National Archives in a Federal Records Administration would make it a passive institution, merely keeping and rendering service on such records as others decided it should have. In such conditions the cultural side of its work would be likely to suffer at the expense of its service functions.³³ Conversely, if it should succeed in retaining its independent status, its cultural activities would become predominant but it would lose much of its influence and responsibility in the record administration field.³⁴

The first formal statement of opinion by the National Archives followed the line that any desirable centralized control of record management activities could best be performed within the framework of the National Archives. This view was expressed by the Archivist of the United States to Mr. Hoover in a letter of January 28, 1949, which commented only on the Leahy Report (the Com-

³⁰ *First Task Force Report*, p. 6.

³¹ John D. Millett to Sidney Mitchell, Oct. 26, 1948, in folder "Records Management — Misc. 1," box 89, First Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

³² Comments by Oliver W. Holmes and Collas Harris, in case file 049-106, RG 64, NA.

³³ Comments by Holmes, in case file 049-106, RG 64, NA.

³⁴ Résumé of discussion at the Archivist's Conference of Mar. 8, 1949, in case file 049-106, RG 64, NA.

mission's report on the Office of General Services had not yet been released).³⁵ Dr. Grover concurred in the other "valuable recommendations" of the task force but thought that the proposal for a Federal Records Administration was of questionable merit. Adding a new agency would only serve to confuse the issue in Congress. The desired objectives, he thought, could be attained by strengthening the National Archives Act to give that agency statutory authority to pursue the program that Mr. Leahy had suggested. The National Archives, he assured Mr. Hoover, was adaptable enough to take over record management activities and had the added advantage of being a "going" organization, with experience in the field.

On March 1, 1949, the President asked all affected departments and agencies for their comments and any recommendations they wished to make in connection with the reports of the Hoover Commission thus far presented to Congress. The Archivist of the United States gave his reply through the Director of the Bureau of the Budget on March 21, in a long, carefully reasoned statement that was in effect a final, comprehensive argument for the continued independence of the National Archives.³⁶ In a number of ways the statement was a more cautious and conservative document than the letter to Mr. Hoover, envisaging a less ambitious role for the National Archives in the record management field. It opposed both the erection of a Records Management Bureau and the inclusion of the National Archives in an Office of General Services. The National Archives, in Dr. Grover's opinion, ought not to be regarded as a housekeeping service of the type proposed for inclusion in the new agency. The statement favored a new Records Management Act that would provide for more effective record programs in the departments and agencies. It stressed the need for developing these separate programs rather than for central direction and control. Such central direction and control as were necessary, the Archivist now thought, should be exercised by the Bureau of the Budget, with only technical assistance from the National Archives. With regard to record centers, Dr. Grover saw nothing to be gained by transferring existing departmental centers to a central agency. He did, however, recommend the establishment of a single Federal record center in the Washington area, to serve as a depository for agencies in that area that lacked such facilities.

³⁵ Folder "Records Management," box 62, First Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

³⁶ Case file 049-106, RG 64, NA.

Legislative Results

Events now began to move in the legislative field. In each house of Congress bills were introduced to carry into effect various recommendations of the Hoover Commission, and there was strong pressure for action at the session then in progress. Under the circumstances the administration decided to give priority to the proposal for an Office of General Services, one of the main Hoover Commission recommendations that seemed likely to gain general acceptance.³⁷

A bill on improved property management, which had been under consideration by a House committee for some time, was modified to incorporate the general recommendations of the relevant Hoover Commission report. This bill, without provision for a Bureau of Records Management, passed the House on June 8, 1949, and went to the Senate.³⁸ The National Archives was asked by the Senate Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Department for information in connection with its version of the bill. This the National Archives supplied in a comprehensive, carefully prepared statement on June 28.³⁹ The statement again discussed the Leahy Report and the related Hoover Commission report. Most of the views expressed by the Archivist 3 months before were reiterated, but there was one significant exception. Instead of suggesting central direction of record management activities by the Bureau of the Budget, the National Archives now went back to its original recommendation to Mr. Hoover that such direction should be given by new organizational units within the framework of the National Archives.

Whether this letter had any influence on the deliberations of either the Committee or the whole Senate is doubtful. Time was short, for the new act was needed to replace existing legislation due to expire at the end of the fiscal year. After rather perfunctory consideration and no hearings, the bill was passed on June 30, 1949. The Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949,⁴⁰ as it was known, created the new General Services Administration, to which it assigned, along with other hitherto independent agencies, the National Archives. With some few exceptions, the act transferred the functions of the Archivist of the United States to the Administrator of General Services. On December 11, 1949, the National Archives Establishment ceased to exist and became, by

³⁷ Holmes, in *American Archivist*, 12: 349.

³⁸ Holmes, in *American Archivist*, 12: 349.

³⁹ Robert H. Bahmer to Senator McClellan, in case file 049-106, part 2, RG 64, NA.

⁴⁰ 63 Stat. 377.

order of the Administrator, Jess Larson, the National Archives and Records Service.⁴¹

The Federal Property and Administrative Services Act resolved only some of the outstanding questions. It was not intended to be more than an administrative stopgap, and it remained for later legislation to define in specific terms the responsibilities of the General Services Administration and other Federal agencies in the record management field. To accomplish this purpose, several bills were introduced in both houses of Congress during the spring of 1950. From these emerged the Federal Records Act of 1950, passed unanimously by both House and Senate, and approved by President Truman on September 5.⁴²

This statute, superseding the National Archives Act of 1934, was the first Federal statute to define record management. It used the broad terms recommended by the Leahy Report, which covered not only record retirement but record creation and maintenance as well. Under the new act the Administrator of General Services was made responsible for improving standards, procedures, and techniques with respect to the creation of records; the organization, maintenance, and use of current records; and the disposition of records no longer needed for current operations. He was also, in accordance with the Hoover Commission recommendations, specifically authorized to establish and operate record centers.⁴³

Although the act, like other recent legislation, assigned all duties and responsibilities to the head of the agency, it assumed that he would delegate them to his best qualified assistants. This the Administrator did in September 1950, delegating to the Archivist of the United States all functions pertaining to archives and records that were assigned to the Administrator by the Administrative Services Act of 1949, the Federal Records Act of 1950, and the Records Disposal Act of 1943.⁴⁴

Heads of agencies were directed by the act of 1950 to make and preserve adequate records of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of their agencies, such as those needed to protect the legal and financial rights of the

⁴¹ GSA Administrative Order No. 27, Dec. 1, 1949.

⁴² 64 Stat. 583.

⁴³ General Services Administration, *Annual Report of the National Archives and Records Service for the Year Ending June 30, 1951*, p. 7, hereafter cited as NARS, *Annual Report . . . 1951*. Existing agency record centers, it should be noted, were not transferred to GSA. Agencies that could show that economy and efficiency were best served by operating their own centers were allowed to do so. See 64 Stat. 586.

⁴⁴ Herbert E. Angel, "Federal Records Management Since the Hoover Commission Report," in *American Archivist*, 16:14 (Jan. 1953).

Government and of persons directly affected by the activities of the agencies. They were also required to establish and maintain effective record management programs to ensure proper control of the creation of records, efficient management of current records, and the prompt and orderly retirement of records no longer needed.⁴⁵

With the legislative recommendation of the Leahy Task Force thus substantially carried out, attention was turned again to the first of its recommendations, that covering a central staff agency for planning and conducting a record management program on a governmentwide basis. The idea of a separate agency having been eliminated, the alternative of working within the framework of the National Archives, now the National Archives and Records Service, was of necessity followed. In December 1949 a Records Management Division was formally established within the National Archives and Records Service. In September 1950, a Records Management Service was established in each of the 10 GSA regions to spread the program to Government agencies in the field. As funds became available, these organizational elements were gradually staffed and began to function along the lines recommended by the Hoover Commission.⁴⁶

Applying itself first to the urgent task of providing more economical storage for noncurrent records, the National Archives and Records Service, by June 30, 1952, had established nine Federal record centers throughout the country, to which Federal agencies were able to transfer nearly 1,500,000 cubic feet of records, thus releasing substantial amounts of office space and filing equipment for other use.⁴⁷ At the same time the Service did not neglect other aspects of its assigned functions. As funds and personnel were provided, it proceeded to draft and issue regulations on record management and an entire new set of general record schedules to facilitate record disposal procedures.⁴⁸ It carried out survey and assistance projects to help agencies develop or revise their record programs. With the benefit of this technical advice, Federal agencies were able to report 95 percent of their records covered by record retirement schedules by June 30, 1954. At the end of the fiscal year 1954 the Records Management Division reported that the volume of Federal records in existence had declined from 25,300,000 cubic feet to 24,700,000 cubic feet, thus at last reversing the long-established trend toward ever larger accumulations. During that

⁴⁵ NARS, *Annual Report . . . 1951*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Angel, in *American Archivist*, 16: 15.

⁴⁷ Angel, in *American Archivist*, 16: 18-19.

⁴⁸ Angel, in *American Archivist*, 16: 15-17.

fiscal year the Federal Government created 2,900,000 cubic feet of records but 3,500,000 cubic feet were destroyed.⁴⁹

The Task Force on Records Management had estimated that annual savings of \$32,000,000 or more could be realized within 2 years of the adoption of its recommendations.⁵⁰ It was estimated that in the fiscal year 1952-53 the actual savings achieved by the record management operations of the General Services Administration were \$34,170,000.⁵¹

THE SECOND HOOVER COMMISSION

The first Hoover Commission made 273 distinct recommendations for reorganizing the Government. As far as can be determined, about 72 percent of these were adopted either through administrative action or through legislation. This is by far the best record made in any of the attempts to reorganize the Federal Government. Had governmental affairs continued on a relatively normal course, the effect of these changes could doubtless have been more readily discernible and more easily measured, both in heightened efficiency and in some tangible reduction of Federal expenditures. Unfortunately, soon after the Commission ended its work, fighting broke out in Korea. This had the effect of increasing the Government's activity and almost doubling the Federal budget, which rose from \$40 billions to \$70 billions.⁵²

The Korean war made old problems more complicated and produced its share of new ones. The Government, especially the Department of Defense, expanded to meet the emergency. Bureaucracy seemed again to be growing unchecked. The annual rate of increase of Federal records rose quickly to well over 3 million cubic feet.⁵³

After the cessation of hostilities, responsible leadership of both the legislative and the executive branches realized that some effort should be made to bring the pendulum back in the direction of economy and efficiency. It also recognized that in 4 years' time some functions of the Government had inevitably changed. Services had expanded, decreased, or altered; the administrative structure of the executive branch had undergone certain modifications. Moreover, many agencies and many areas of governmental activity had not

⁴⁹ NARS, *Annual Report . . . 1954*, p. 6.

⁵⁰ *First Task Force Report*, p. 39.

⁵¹ Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, *Task Force on Paperwork Management; Part I—In the United States Government*, p. 11 (Washington, 1955), hereafter cited as *Second Task Force Report*, part 1.

⁵² James W. Fesler, "Administrative Literature and the Second Hoover Commission Reports," in *American Political Science Review*, 51:147 (Mar. 1957).

⁵³ NARS, *Annual Report . . . 1952*, p. 61.

come under the scrutiny of the original Hoover Commission, broad though the scope of its inquiry was, and some of the recommendations of the Commission had not been put into effect. In the light of these facts there was general agreement in Congress that another comprehensive study of the Government's organization, methods, and functions was needed in order to eliminate defects and shortcomings.

The Brown-Ferguson Act, providing for a second Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, was accordingly passed by Congress without a dissenting vote; it was approved by President Eisenhower on July 10, 1953, almost exactly 6 years after the establishment of the first Commission.⁵⁴ In many respects the new act was similar to the earlier Lodge-Brown Act. As before, the President, the Vice President, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives were each authorized to appoint two private citizens and two persons from public life. The Commission, when appointed, was again authorized to select its own chairman, and again it chose Mr. Hoover. There was no statutory requirement for bipartisan representation on the new Commission, but this principle was actually observed: seven members were registered Republicans, five registered Democrats.⁵⁵

The Brown-Ferguson Act charged the second Hoover Commission with the duty "to promote economy, efficiency, and improved service in the transaction of the public business." It was to accomplish this purpose by recommending methods and procedures for:

1. Reducing expenditures to the lowest amount consistent with the effective performance of essential services, activities, and functions;
2. Eliminating duplication and overlapping of services, activities, and functions;
3. Consolidating services, activities, and functions of a similar nature;
4. Abolishing services, activities, and functions not necessary to the efficient conduct of Government;
5. Eliminating nonessential services, activities, and functions that were competitive with private enterprise;
6. Defining responsibilities of officials; and
7. Relocating in departments or other agencies those agencies responsible directly to the President.⁵⁶

The Commission, moreover, was authorized to propose in its

⁵⁴ 67 Stat. 142; *Status, Hoover Report*, 1: 11.

⁵⁵ Five of the members had served with the first Hoover Commission. MacNeil and Metz, *Hoover Report*, p. 9, 16.

⁵⁶ 67 Stat. 142.

final report, due by May 31, 1955, not only legislative enactments and administrative actions, but also such constitutional amendments as, in its judgment, were necessary to carry out its recommendations.⁵⁷

This was, indeed, a sweeping authorization, compared to which the scope of the first Hoover Commission had been quite limited. The first Commission's investigations and recommendations had been concerned with the procedural aspects of Federal administration; it had asked only *how well* a governmental function was being performed, not *whether it should* be performed. The new Commission was empowered to go beyond this and to raise the substantive question of whether a given Federal activity should be continued or discontinued, regardless of the efficiency with which that activity was being administered. Consistently with this expansion of its powers, the second Commission was authorized to subpoena witnesses and documents, a privilege not granted to its predecessor.⁵⁸

With the experience of the first Hoover Commission before it, the new Commission decided to use the task force method of study. It set up a total of 19 task forces or committees to do its investigative work. The task forces were given a completely free hand by the Commission, both in making their studies and in writing their reports. They were allowed to gather their information wherever they were able to find it and were instructed simply to make such recommendations as they believed were required in the light of the facts. The subpoena power granted by Congress was not in fact employed in any instance, for the task forces generally enjoyed the willing cooperation of Government officials.⁵⁹

Although the second Hoover Commission took up its duties in the fall of 1953, it did not give attention to record problems until the following summer. On June 20, 1954, a task force to deal with this subject was set up. Mr. Hoover again asked Emmett J. Leahy to serve as chairman. As members of his new task force, Mr. Leahy appointed Herbert E. Angel⁶⁰ and Edmund D. Dwyer, representing the public service, and Thomas F. Conroy (of Pan American Airways) and Berchel H. Harper (of the Northern Natural Gas Co.), representing private industry. The task force also had the services of a staff director, Matson Holbrook; a consultant; two assistant

⁵⁷ 67 Stat. 144.

⁵⁸ 67 Stat. 144.

⁵⁹ MacNeil and Metz, *Hoover Report*, p. 20.

⁶⁰ Mr. Angel had served on the earlier record management task force. In September 1954 he was given a leave of absence to serve as an adviser to the Iranian Government, and he took no further part in the work of the paperwork management task force.

staff directors; and more than a dozen professional civil servants heading study groups in various areas of the record management field.⁶¹

The new task force called itself the Task Force on Paperwork Management rather than record management. This change in terminology was made because the term record management had tended to become synonymous, in both industry and Government, with record storage and disposal only. The first task force had not intended so to restrict the meaning of the term, but in the subsequent implementation of its recommendations emphasis had been laid almost exclusively on these aspects of the matter. To make it clear that the scope of the new task force's assignment was much broader, the more comprehensive term paperwork management was chosen.⁶²

At the outset, the task force voted not to retain the services of any firms or organizations, profit or nonprofit. The members of the task force and its special consultants were made available by their respective Government agencies or firms without compensation, and the Commission therefore incurred expenses only for travel and secretarial service.⁶³ When the National Records Management Council, which had made the first task force survey, offered its assistance cost-free to the new task force, the offer was declined.⁶⁴

The Paperwork Management Task Force divided its work into two phases. First it would analyze the creation of papers in the Federal Government and study the application of various proven techniques to cut back clerical and housekeeping costs and to improve the management of necessary paperwork. Second it would make a special study of the paperwork and recordkeeping required by the Federal Government of private business and individuals to see if eliminations and consolidations could be achieved and if retention requirements could be reduced.⁶⁵

During the initial phase of its work the task force examined the results of the record management recommendations of the first Hoover Commission and then went on to study the four basic elements of paperwork in the Government: correspondence manage-

⁶¹ Folder "Topics for Consideration, Task Force on Paperwork Management," box 118, Second Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

⁶² *Second Task Force Report*, part 1, p. 11.

⁶³ Minutes of First Task Force Meeting, Aug 11, 1954, box 118, Second Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

⁶⁴ Robert A. Shiff, executive director, National Records Management Council, to Matson Holbrook, Sept. 3, 1954, in folder "Miscellaneous Letters," box 117, Second Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

⁶⁵ Matson Holbrook to Henry M. Shine, Jr., Assistant Secretary, Task Force on Legal Services and Procedures, memorandum, Aug. 6, 1954, in folder "Correspondence No. 2," box 117, Second Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

ment, form management, report management, and systems of handling directives and instructions. Next came investigations of file management, agency mail operations, policy regarding the use of business machines, methods of quality control, and the uses and working of the secretariat system.⁶⁶

The personnel of the task force was organized into a number of work groups for making fact-finding studies in each of these fields. The groups did their research mainly in 14 of the larger agencies, which employ about 95 percent of all Federal employees, and, to a lesser degree, in such smaller staff agencies as the Bureau of the Budget, the Civil Service Commission, and the General Accounting Office. The reports made by the groups provided basic information for the report of the task force,⁶⁷ and several of them were issued later as separate publications.⁶⁸

At informal meetings during July and early August 1954, attended only by Messrs. Leahy, Angel, and Dwyer, preliminary outlines of operation were worked out, personnel was chosen for the chief staff assignments, and the first 10 of the work groups were set up and staffed. The first formal meeting of the task force was held on August 11. Subsequent meetings were held not on any regular schedule but only as progress warranted.⁶⁹

Task Force Report on Paperwork in Government

Mr. Leahy and his staff began drafting the task force report on the governmental phase of their inquiry early in October and submitted it to the Commission on November 19. This document bore many resemblances to its predecessor of 6 years before. It was replete with dramatic statistics for which exact sources were seldom given. It dwelt at length on "horrible examples" of paperwork management, or lack of paperwork management, that the work groups had discovered, and occasionally it touched on examples of good practice. As before, the entire field was covered three times. The detailed findings of the task force, which themselves contained numerous recommendations, filled some 40 pages of the report; the formal conclusions and recommendations, covering the same ground, occupied 5 pages; and the recommendations were then elaborated upon in a final 6 pages of "Detailed Recommendations."

⁶⁶ *Second Task Force Report*, part 1, p. 9.

⁶⁷ *Second Task Force Report*, part 1, p. 7.

⁶⁸ These include: *Correspondence in the Federal Government; Pursuit of Perfection, a Report on the Need for Paperwork Quality Management; How the Secretariat Aids Executive Action*; and *Business Machines Management Survey* — all issued in processed form in October 1954.

⁶⁹ Folder "Material for First Meeting of Task Force," box 117, Second Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA; also box 118, *ibid*.

Beginning with a retrospective glance, the report complimented the General Services Administration on its excellent job in the record management field, considering its limited resources. Together with the Federal Records Act, its work represented substantial fulfillment of the basic recommendations of the first Hoover Commission. Mr. Leahy hinted in passing, however, that the Records Management Division might have been handicapped by its location in the National Archives and Record Service, which associated it too closely with the connotation of archives.⁷⁰

Turning to Government agencies, Mr. Leahy found that, on the whole, less attention was being given to paperwork problems than they properly demanded. In many agencies, it was true, sizable management staffs had been assigned to deal with them, but the results obtained were disproportionately small. The outstanding exceptions, in which very encouraging results had been achieved, were few and far between. Agencies did not yet realize, according to Mr. Leahy, what a big business Government paperwork was or what large savings could be achieved if wholehearted interest and support were given to making programs for its control more effective. It was, according to the estimate of the task force, a four-billion-dollar business; and as much as a quarter of a billion, Mr. Leahy predicted, could be saved each year if existing successful control programs were extended throughout the Government. The task force recommended that, to improve the existing situation, the following steps should be taken:

1. The establishment of a Paperwork Management Service in the General Services Administration by Executive order. This was to be completely separate from the National Archives and Records Service and was to take over such staff functions of paperwork management as existed in that Service except for management of the Federal record centers.

2. The establishment of a paperwork management program for the Government as a whole to carry out continuing agency-wide programs of comprehensive scope under the guidance of well-qualified personnel.⁷¹

In addition, the report recommended that the Administrator of General Services carry into effect promptly some 22 detailed recommendations. Among these recommendations were the following: that the General Services Administration endeavor to have agencies reevaluate their records in order to reduce the percentage designated as permanent; that efforts be made to curtail the use of legal-size filing cabinets and documents in the Government; that the General

⁷⁰ *Second Task Force Report*, part 1, p. 10-13.

⁷¹ *Second Task Force Report*, part 1, p. 49-52.

Services Administration sponsor a correspondence style board to develop a manual of standard practice for Government correspondence; that the General Services Administration strive to secure the storage of one-half instead of the existing one-third of all Federal records in record centers; that standards be established for evaluating the operation of record centers with a view to eliminating those whose performance record proved them to be uneconomical; and that a system be established to encourage and facilitate the free interchange of excess office machines and filing equipment between agencies.⁷²

In its own report to Congress, the second Hoover Commission repeated in condensed and simplified language most of the findings of its task force. It did not, however, concur exactly in the major recommendations of the task force. Instead of stressing organizational terms in its first recommendation, as the task force had done, it subordinated these to functional terms and allowed more latitude in their application. In this recommendation it proposed three things:

a. That the President establish a governmentwide paperwork management program by Executive order and direct agencies to give it their support;

b. That the General Services Administration be given responsibility for general supervision over all phases of paperwork management throughout the executive branch of the Government in order to simplify and improve it and reduce its cost and volume; and

c. That such staff functions of paperwork management as existed in the National Archives and Records Service be consolidated in the organization established in the General Services Administration to implement these recommendations.⁷³

Its second major recommendation was that each agency should make one of its high-ranking officials responsible for reviewing, simplifying, and reducing the volume of its forms, correspondence, and reports and should cooperate with the General Services Administration in developing ways and means of carrying out this function. With regard to the many specific minor recommendations made by the task force, the full commission repeated and endorsed almost the entire array.⁷⁴

⁷² *Second Task Force Report*, part 1, p. 55-60.

⁷³ Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, *Paperwork Management; Part I—In the United States Government. A Report to the Congress*, p. 17-18 (Washington, 1955), hereafter cited as *Second Hoover Commission, Report to Congress*, part 1.

⁷⁴ *Second Hoover Commission, Report to Congress*, part 1, p. 18-22.

Administrative Results

In order to carry into effect parts *a* and *b* of the Commission's first recommendation, the General Services Administration submitted to the Bureau of the Budget in May 1955 a proposed Executive order establishing a governmentwide paperwork management program, defining the respective responsibilities of the General Services Administration and the other executive agencies, and providing the authority necessary for attaining the objectives of the program. The Bureau of the Budget, however, decided that an Executive order was unnecessary. Instead, the President at the Cabinet meeting of August 12, 1955, formally requested department and agency heads to cooperate with the General Services Administration and designated that Administration to serve in a central assisting and supervisory capacity with respect to the paperwork management program of the executive branch.⁷⁵

Through the Bureau of the Budget the President also asked the General Services Administration to advise and assist agencies in improving their paperwork management procedures. In recognition of these responsibilities, both the Budget Bureau and Congress approved additional funds for expanding the Federal record centers of the General Services Administration and for increasing its staff for record and paperwork management.⁷⁶

In carrying out part *c* of the Commission's first recommendation, the Administrator of General Services decided that the function of paperwork management should remain in the National Archives and Records Service. To emphasize its importance and additional scope, however, the function was assigned to a newly established Office of Records Management, headed by an Assistant Archivist of the United States. This reorganization of the National Archives and Records Service, which involved the simultaneous advancement of the National Archives from division to office status, became effective November 1, 1956.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ NARS, *Annual Report . . . 1955*, p. 1; also Percy Rappaport, Assistant Director, Bureau of the Budget, to E. F. Mansure, Administrator of General Services, Jan. 26, 1956, and "Revised Cabinet Record of Action No. 30," White House memorandum to E. F. Mansure, Aug. 22, 1955, both in folder "Legal-7," files of the Office of Records Management, NARS.

⁷⁶ Rowland R. Hughes, Director, Bureau of the Budget, to E. F. Mansure, Dec. 21, 1955, in folder "Legal-7," files of the Office of Records Management, NARS; Inter-agency Records Administration Conference, *Hoover Commission Paperwork Management Reports — What's Next?*, p. 2 (Report of meeting, Nov. 16, 1956), hereafter cited as IRAC, *Paperwork Management Reports*.

⁷⁷ IRAC, *Paperwork Management Reports*, p. 2. See also Director, Records Management Division, NARS, to Comptroller, GSA, memorandum, Mar. 28, 1955, and Franklin G. Floete, Administrator of General Services, to Percival F. Brundage, Director, Bureau

The second major recommendation of the Commission, that paperwork management responsibilities be specifically assigned to high-ranking officials in the departments and agencies, has begun to be carried out by administrative action. These responsibilities have been assigned in many cases to agency record officers.⁷⁸

Without waiting for either new authority or extra funds, the General Services Administration began promptly to carry out as many of the minor recommendations of the Hoover Commission as possible. New sections of the GSA Regulations, covering the creation of records and their organization, maintenance, and use, were drafted and referred to the Federal Records Council. Supplementing these, three instructional handbooks were published. Two of these, *Form Letters* and *Plain Letters*, were aimed at improving the content and reducing the cost of Government correspondence. The third, *Federal Records Centers*, was prepared to facilitate the prompt transfer of records to these centers.⁷⁹ The Office of Records Management also began to prepare plans, in cooperation with the Bureau of the Budget, for a governmentwide correspondence style manual.⁸⁰

It also began a critical analysis of the effectiveness of all agency record retirement schedules with the object of achieving substantial reductions in the "permanent" category. It was expected that this category would shrink from 26 percent to 21 percent in the fiscal year 1955 alone because of a large volume of disposal in two or three important agencies. Although careful study, research, and review are required, further significant progress is looked for over a period of several years. The capacity of General Services Administration record centers has been enlarged, and a steadily increasing volume of records is being transferred from agency space to this type of storage. By the end of the 1957 fiscal year, 42 percent of all Federal records were expected to be in record centers (including the National Archives), and the goal of 50 percent should be attained by about 1960, if financial support continues to be available.⁸¹

In working towards the objective of eliminating uneconomical agency record centers, the General Services Administration was of the Budget, Apr. 9, 1957, in folder "Legal-7," files of the Office of Records Management, NARS.

⁷⁸ IRAC, *Paperwork Management Reports*, p. 3.

⁷⁹ NARS, *Annual Report . . . 1955*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Floete to Brundage, Apr. 4, 1957, in folder "Legal-7," files of the Office of Records Management, NARS.

⁸¹ Floete to Brundage, Apr. 4, 1957, in folder "Legal-7," files of the Office of Records Management, NARS. See also Records Management Memorandum, May 12, 1955, in folder "Miscellaneous Letters," box 117, Second Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

successful in effecting the closing of centers operated by the Veterans Administration, the Selective Service System, and the Internal Revenue Service and the transfer of their records to its own centers. At the end of the fiscal year 1955 this left a total of only 34 Government record centers besides the 11 operated by the General Services Administration, and this figure was further reduced to 25 by June 30, 1956. Nearly all of these 25 centers were operated by the military departments or related agencies such as the Atomic Energy Commission.⁸²

Looking towards ultimate elimination of the use of legal-size filing cabinets, the General Services Administration encouraged agencies to prepare fewer legal-size documents. The Division of the Federal Register contributed to this effort by requiring agencies to file regulatory documents on letter-size rather than legal-size paper.⁸³

Task Force Report on Paperwork Required of Citizens

In January 1955, with the first phase of its assignment completed, the Task Force on Paperwork Management turned its attention to the second phase, a tentative, exploratory venture into the field of paperwork and recordkeeping required by the Federal Government of corporations, small businesses, and individuals. Its purpose was to find ways and means of reducing the volume of this work, which put a considerable burden on private industry, and to investigate the actual usefulness of these records to the Government. It was alleged that many reports were required of industry by one Government agency when the information was already on hand in another, that large quantities of records submitted by industry were never used, and that many reports had to be made by industry merely to state that there was nothing to report, that is, that there was no change in conditions or figures previously reported.⁸⁴ If these conditions existed, the field would be fruitful for achieving important economies.

The picture was vast and complex. No less than 66 different bureaus and offices of the Federal Government were involved, and there were nearly 1,000 different Government regulations requiring

⁸² Floete to Brundage, Apr. 4, 1957, in folder "Legal-7," files of the Office of Records Management, NARS; NARS, *Annual Report . . . 1955*, p. 5.

⁸³ Floete to Brundage, Apr. 4, 1957, in folder "Legal-7," files of the Office of Records Management, NARS.

⁸⁴ Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, *Task Force Report on Paperwork Management; Part II—The Nation's Paperwork for the Government, an Experiment*, p. 1 (Washington, 1955), hereafter cited as *Second Task Force Report*, part 2.

the keeping of many hundreds of types of records. In the field of Federal procurement alone there were more than 50 specific record-keeping requirements, the nature of which varied according to the period when the contract was made, the type of contract, the goods or services contracted for, and any special legislation pertinent to the contract.⁸⁵

In attacking this problem the task force sought the cooperation of the industries affected. It organized nearly 30 industrial "sub-task force committees," covering businesses such as airlines, railroads, trucking, utilities, wholesale foods, and dairies. The members of each committee were drawn from private industries or trade associations representative of each group. These sub-task force committees were requested to measure, evaluate, and report on the impact of Federal reporting requirements in their segments of industry.⁸⁶

Only a minor part of the vast field of business reporting could be investigated. Of the 4,700 individual reporting requirements prescribed in nearly 1,000 Federal regulations and laws, 328 were selected for examination. In the 4 months left for its investigations, however, the task force was able to complete studies of only 75 of these. Twenty-nine industries gave their assistance and 32 Government agencies and bureaus cooperated.⁸⁷

At this point the task force departed somewhat from its prescribed path and endeavored in these 75 individual cases to secure the elimination or relaxation of recordkeeping requirements, if this could be done by administrative action. Without any specific authority to act, it encouraged informal negotiations between particular businesses or industries and Government agencies, and served in a sense as a mediator or arbiter. It was able to report "positive corrective action" by the Government in 49 instances and "partial corrective action" in the other 26. These results, it asserted, had saved over \$15,000,000 in paperwork costs to business and Government. This was more than 5 times the cost of the second Hoover Commission and more than 300 times the cost of the task force.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ *Second Task Force Report*, part 2, p. 17, 23.

⁸⁶ J. Stewart Elwell (staff member of the task force) to William J. Flynn, Comptroller, Columbia Broadcasting Systems, Mar. 1, 1955, in folder "Correspondence No. 1," box 117, Second Hoover Commission files, RG 264, NA.

⁸⁷ *Second Task Force Report*, part 2, p. 5-7, 53.

⁸⁸ *Second Task Force Report*, part 2, p. 1, 57-59. The unorthodox conduct of the task force in this part of its work met with the disapproval of one of the Commissioners, Rep. Chet Holifield. In the report of the full Commission to Congress on the subject, he registered a formal dissent, stating that it was not "wise or proper" for the task force to depart from its function as a study group and "to seek to influence agency action on its own responsibility and before reporting to the Commission." Commission

On May 21, 1955, the task force submitted to the Hoover Commission its report on the second phase of its operations. Like its predecessors, this report was written by the chairman, Mr. Leahy, and in the same style. After describing in detail what the task force had discovered and had been able to accomplish on its own, the report concluded that here was indeed a promising area for making great savings and that the good work begun ought to be continued. For this purpose it recommended that Congress establish a Commission on Paperwork Required by Offices and Departments (PROD for short), to consist of three advisers to the President, serving without compensation. The members of the Commission were to be chosen from both Government and industry, and the Commission would operate for 2 years. The implied function of this body was to continue the work and follow the methods of the task force.⁸⁹

The full Hoover Commission paid tribute to the achievements of the task force in this new area. It was reluctant, however, to recommend imposing any additional burdens on the President, and it therefore dropped the idea of the PROD Commission. It also pointed out a fact that the task force had ignored, namely, that the Bureau of the Budget and the General Services Administration had certain legal responsibilities in this field that should be recognized. The Hoover Commission believed that if these agencies would carry on their activities using the methods employed by the task force, they could obtain the desired results. Setting aside the task force's recommendation, therefore, it proposed: "That the President direct the Bureau of the Budget . . . in cooperation with the General Services Administration, to give increased emphasis in their reports program to the need to protect the public from unnecessary reporting burdens by continuing the method of cooperation between industry and Government pursued by our task force."⁹⁰

The General Services Administration had contributed to the work of the task force by compiling a comprehensive list of Federal requirements for the keeping of records by business, private persons, and State and local governments, which was published in the *Federal Register* on April 8, 1955. The first compilation of its kind, this list provided a valuable point of departure for the task force and was much in demand by private business.⁹¹

on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, *Paperwork Management; Part II — The Nation's Paperwork for the Government, an Experiment. A Report to the Congress*, p. 17, 18 (Washington, 1955), hereafter cited as Second Hoover Commission, *Report to Congress*, part 2.

⁸⁹ *Second Task Force Report*, part 2, p. 53.

⁹⁰ Second Hoover Commission, *Report to Congress*, part 2, p. 6.

⁹¹ NARS, *Annual Report . . . 1955*, p. 3.

In the fall of 1955 the General Services Administration wrote to the Budget Bureau asking what plans were being made for it to render assistance in this program in accordance with the recommendation of the Hoover Commission. The General Services Administration believed that, within the framework of existing legislation, it could at least keep up to date the guide to record retention requirements, which had been found so useful, and that it might assume responsibility for regularly reviewing the requirements and negotiating with agencies for their elimination, simplification, or clarification. It believed, however, that a written statement of the scope of its activities should be worked out with the Bureau of the Budget or that a Presidential directive should be issued to make its position clear to other agencies.⁹²

After some delay a Presidential directive was forthcoming. In a letter to the Director of the Bureau of the Budget, dated May 11, 1956, President Eisenhower gave his endorsement to Part II of the Hoover Commission's recommendations and asserted that the Budget Bureau was the logical agency to assume leadership in such activities. He asked for greater emphasis on the program and requested the Bureau to "consult . . . when appropriate with the General Services Administration."⁹³

In carrying out these responsibilities, the Bureau of the Budget has invited business and industry to call to its attention any instances of unnecessary paperwork burdens resulting from Federal reports. It has also begun a systematic reexamination of all previously approved forms and reporting requirements with a view to eliminating those found to be unessential. Finally, it has begun to follow up on the unfinished business of the Paperwork Management Task Force, but rather more cautiously, on the principle that, while unnecessary paperwork burdens must be avoided, valid needs for information must be met, and in every instance the final determination must be in terms of public interest rather than private convenience.⁹⁴

For its part, the General Services Administration published a second edition of the guide to record retention requirements in the *Federal Register* in August 1956. Simultaneously the Budget Bureau recommended to the heads of executive departments that agencies requiring the public to retain records should specify in their

⁹² E. F. Mansure to Rowland Hughes, Oct. 10, 1955; Records Management Division, NARS, to Comptroller, GSA, memorandum, Aug. 11, 1955; and A. E. Snyder, Assistant Administrator of General Services, to Congressman W. L. Dawson, Feb. 7, 1956 — all in folder "Legal-7," files of the Office of Records Management, NARS.

⁹³ *Congressional Record*, May 22, 1956, p. 7774.

⁹⁴ IRAC, *Paperwork Management Reports*, p. 9-14.

requirements a fixed retention period and permit the microfilming of such records after a nominal length of time.⁹⁵

So far as the authority and responsibility in this area of paperwork management have now evolved, the Bureau of the Budget has the dominant role and the General Services Administration a secondary and contributory role.

APPRAISAL OF THE HOOVER COMMISSIONS

An appraisal of the significance of the two Hoover Commissions and their accomplishments in the fields of record management and paperwork management can only be tentative and provisional at this early date since we lack the long perspective necessary for a balanced judgment. Indeed, as some of the second Hoover Commission's recommendations are yet to be fully carried out, it would be premature to consider its story closed.

We may safely say, however, that the record administration problem was critical in 1947 and that the first Hoover Commission offered an opportunity to work out a solution, which it was wise to exploit. The work of the first task force stimulated in agency managements more interest in and general support for record administration than they had ever had before. It focused attention on the problem and brought some badly needed action. Whether the action taken was in every instance the best is still, of course, open to question. The Federal Records Act of 1950 has surely been a great gain, and the establishment of Federal record centers has given needed temporary relief to agencies whose offices were glutted with noncurrent records.

The work of the second Hoover Commission's task force was only an outgrowth of the first, taking up unfinished business and attempting to elaborate and develop those aspects of record management that had been pushed aside to give attention to the immediate problems of storage and disposal. The enlargement of staff supervision by the National Archives and Records Service over paperwork is another recognition of the growing importance of this field in the operation of the Federal Government.

⁹⁵ Bureau of the Budget, *Bulletin*, no. 57-3, Aug. 14, 1956.