



United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

General Government Division

B-249843

August 13, 1992

The Honorable Constance Morella  
House of Representatives



147363

Dear Ms. Morella:

This is in response to your letter to us concerning the inquiry received from Florence Perman, your constituent, regarding the high cost of certain government publications. Ms. Perman questioned why Affirmative Employment Statistics should cost \$35 per copy, and Pay Structure of the Federal Civil Service should cost \$19 when ordered from the National Technical Information Service (NTIS). She noted that the World Almanac, with similar but more voluminous statistical data, is available to the public for \$7.95.

Under Section 3704-A of Title 15 of the United States Code, NTIS was set up to function as a clearing house for the collection and dissemination of scientific, technical, and engineering information. By law, NTIS is to be self-sufficient and should recover any costs it incurs in performing services for members of the public such as making documents available for sale (Title 15, U.S. Code 1153). Consistent with this legal mandate, NTIS officials told us that all operating costs, including salaries, rent, utilities, marketing, promoting, printing, and postage, are paid from sales income, not from tax-supported congressional appropriations.

In addition to serving as a clearinghouse, NTIS serves as a permanent archive for all reports acquired by the government, now numbering over 2 million. These reports represent hundreds of billions of dollars spent by federal agencies, state and local government, and foreign governments on research and development. Maintaining this archive requires the dedication of money, facilities, and personnel. These costs are included in the prices set for the information products made available by NTIS.

According to NTIS, it receives approximately 65,000 new information products on an annual basis, in addition to the 2 million reports in the archive. Of the 2 million reports, only 300 reports sold more than 100 copies last year. It is

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also important to note that approximately 60 percent of all reports ordered are not available from inventory, but must be especially reproduced on an individual basis. This reproduction is accomplished by retrieving the microfiche archival copy of the report and then reproducing a paper copy from the microfiche.

In the case of such reports as Affirmative Employment Statistics, NTIS provides a means for public dissemination when the sponsoring agency, in this case the Office of Personnel Management, intends only a limited primary distribution and when the Government Printing Office (GPO) has not included the report in its sales program. GPO selects for its sales program only those reports with significant sales potential. When the copies of a report printed by GPO are exhausted, the report is out of print and no longer available.

Publishers and sellers of publications like the World Almanac are able to charge less for their publications because they are able to obtain economies of scale in printing. Printing and sales of such publications as the World Almanac run in hundreds of thousands. In contrast, NTIS said it has sold only eight copies of Affirmative Employment Statistics. NTIS does not have the printing economies of scale that a major book publisher or GPO enjoy.

We trust this information satisfies your request. Please call me on 202-275-8676 if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely yours,



L. Nye Stevens  
Director, Government Business  
Operations Issues

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