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# Commission on Federal Paperwork

During the past decade there has been a great increase in detailed federal intrusions into many areas of society, including local and state government, education, and small and large business. Correspondingly, there has been an expanded federal demand for paperwork. The annual cost to society is now estimated at \$100 billion. Paperwork is one of the reasons why the federal bureaucracy is held in low regard and why Congress fares poorly in opinion polls.

But Congress often acts constructively. This was true when it enacted Public Law 93-556 in December 1974, creating the Commission on Federal Paperwork. The Commission was given a 2-year mandate and total financial support of about \$10 million. Work of the Commission began 3 October 1975. When its term ends shortly, the Commission will have issued 25 well-written reports and made about 750 recommendations for cutting paperwork. Already about a third of these have been adopted, involving annual savings of \$3.5 billion. Ultimately, after implementation of more of the recommendations, the annual savings could mount to \$10 billion. The staff of the Commission believes that with additional determined efforts, the annual savings might be made to rise to \$30 to \$40 billion.

Four key ingredients went into the success of the venture. The staff of the Commission was small but excellent. The 2-year time limit lent urgency to the enterprise. The staff reached out and involved citizens broadly, casting itself in the role of ombudsman. On the Commission were key figures including the Comptroller General, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Senator McIntyre, and Representative Horton, who could help expedite the implementation of recommendations.

The average citizen views the federal government as a single coordinated entity. In a report on federal, state, and local cooperation, the Commission sets forth a quite different view. With the tremendous growth in federal activities (more than 1000 assistance programs) we now live in an era of government by program. The realities are described in the report.\*

"Such growth has fostered the development of compartmentalized and distinct interest groups, committed to individual program objectives more than to the general welfare of the Nation and its citizens. These program interest groups are represented organizationally by programmatic bureaucracies and constituencies containing those individuals concerned with delivering the services and achieving the objectives of that particular program. The interest groups extend from congressional committees, through Federal bureaucracies and their delivery systems within State and local governments. The result has been, in effect, a *series* of governments, based not on geographic communities and their own elected governments, but rather, separate, administrative governments intent on achieving program objectives. . . .

"Each program and its bureaucracy has developed its own separate information requirements, separate reporting and recordkeeping systems, separate financial management systems, separate audit systems, separate accounting systems and separate planning requirements. Even within the separate program administrative governments, regulation, information and paperwork requirements have created enormous burdens."

In effect, the Commission is telling us that with the proliferation of programs, a corresponding proliferation of paperwork was inevitable. Some of the paperwork can be eliminated, but the true solution lies in consolidating or eliminating programs.

The Commission on Federal Paperwork has demonstrated that a government organization can be forthright and effective while being responsive to citizens. A new follow-on organization designed to help point the way to more efficient government seems indicated.—PHILIP H. ABELSON

\*"Federal/state/local cooperation, final report," staff report submitted to the Commission on Federal Paperwork, 29 June 1977, pp. IV-2 and IV-3.