

(f) *Department of Agriculture*

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, May 16, 1963.

Hon. KERMIT GORDON,
Director, Bureau of the Budget.

DEAR MR. GORDON: This is in reply to the Mr. Rommel's request of April 10, 1963, for a report on H.R. 5171, a bill "to authorize the Administrator of the GSA to coordinate and otherwise provide for the economic and efficient purchase, lease, maintenance, operation, and utilization of electronic data-processing equipment by Federal departments and agencies."

We agree with the objectives of this bill; however, we do not believe that legislation is required to accomplish those objectives.

In Agriculture, we have established three department computer centers. The Secretary has announced that a fourth is to be established. These centers, which are operated by agencies of the Department, serve all organizations within the Department. This sharing provides accessibility to electronic data-processing equipment and experienced personnel at reasonable costs—yet the common direction, under the Secretary of Agriculture, of equipment, personnel and users, provides a manageable operation.

Small-scale computers are being made available to our scientific personnel at laboratories, engineering and research installations. This approach places another tool in these installations. There, the use of a computer can be a means of increasing the effectiveness of the available man-hours of personnel who are in very short supply.

The field of electronic data processing has advanced very rapidly in the 7 years since this Department installed its first computer—it is still developing at a tremendous rate. The rate of advancement in the use of EDP equipment is more dependent—today—on the design of systems, gaining acceptance, programming, and installation, than on the equipment. However, the success of these activities is closely dependent upon the confidence of program personnel that electronic data-processing equipment and personnel will perform as planned. This can be obtained most readily when the management of EDP and the user are within the same department.

This bill would provide an electronic data-processing fund for purchasing computers. This objective is most desirable.

This bill would permit the establishment of centers which could be used by organizations that do not have sufficient work to fully use a computer. We use time on computers of other departments, such as the Treasury Department and the Weather Bureau. The sharing of a computer by small users is being accomplished by the Philadelphia computer sharing project sponsored by the Bureau of the Budget. Thus, this objective of the bill is now being met in three ways—department computer centers, bilateral department arrangements to share equipment, and the Bureau of the Budget sponsored multidepartment equipment sharing project.

This bill would provide central control over the purchase or lease of EDP equipment. This is now provided by Bureau of the Budget standards covering any acquisition of computers. GAO audits of compliance and of utilization of equipment provide for the enforcement of these standards.

Considerable data is transmitted to computers. This, in most cases, we believe would continue even though computers were available at many locations. The cost of dual maintenance of programs of different computers would be an offsetting factor to any data transmission cost reduction. And, any standardization of equipment, which could eliminate dual programming, would be to the disadvantage of the small EDP manufacturer.

For these reasons, it appears that the objectives of the bill are being accomplished and that the bill, as proposed, would result in a decrease rather than an increase in the rate of placing work on EDP equipment.

Sincerely,

CHARLES S. MURPHY,
Under Secretary.