

in making requests to other agencies for the kind of data we want. We know we can get what we want from them, we know they will try to help us, but we know we are asking them to try to do something which is a diversion from their main task and a new and added burden on them. If we had a statistical service center or a national data center, we would have a group which is enthusiastically ready, able, and willing to meet our needs. That would be their job, and they would welcome our requests as part of their main activity. In the longer run, the important contribution that the data center could make to the Council's efforts is by strengthening this partnership between the private researchers and the needs of policy, as I indicated in my statement. A great deal of the economic knowledge that is relevant to policymaking has to come from universities and such private foundations as the National Bureau of Economic Research and The Brookings Institution. The more data they have and the more we can interest them in doing research on matters that are relevant to economic policy, the better our economic policy is going to be.

Chairman TALMADGE. Would it help to develop an evaluation of specific Government programs?

Mr. OKUN. Would the national data center help?

Chairman TALMADGE. Yes.

Mr. OKUN. The evaluation of Federal expenditure programs is, as you know, largely the work of the individual agencies that operate those programs and of the Budget Bureau. I do not really feel fully qualified to say what data are needed for the evaluation of Federal expenditure programs. Obviously, in most cases, the programs themselves need to generate the data—and their own operating management data—which tell them how they are doing and how well they are operating. Particularly in guiding the development of new programs, however, we would benefit from information that could be available in the Federal data center.

Chairman TALMADGE. Which statistical improvements should have the highest priority?

Mr. OKUN. It is very difficult to award the top prizes for high priority in statistical needs. For one thing, the costs of various possible improvements may vary greatly. It might be highly desirable to have a particular set of statistics, and yet, if getting it accomplished were so expensive that it foreclosed many other opportunities, we would have to move it down on the priority list. I spelled out several areas of need in a letter that was published by the Joint Economic Committee in "Improved Statistics for Economic Growth," March 1966 (pp. 79-81).

I noted earlier the continuing statistical gaps in the construction field. In the area of labor markets, we sorely need data on fringe benefits and on unfilled job vacancies. Balance sheet information on investments abroad and new statistics on export and import prices deserve high priority in the international field. I also consider it essential to expand and improve our surveys of business and consumer plans. Finally, I might mention that the need for better information on inventories has been underlined by the critical role of that sector in the current economic situation.