THE COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL PROGRAMS

INTRODUCTION

In its 1967 Economic Report, the Joint Economic Committee directed the Subcommittee on Economic Statistics "to look into the possibilities of a truly integrated system providing genuinely comparable statistics consistent with and meshed into an overall system of economic statistics including the Federal, State, and local governments." Two considerations gave rise to this directive: (1) statistical information about the economy is necessary for good management in both the public and the private sectors; and (2) at this time in the evolution of our statistical services, significant improvements lie in the direction of further coordination and integration.[1]

In our modern private enterprise economy and in our system of Federal, State, and local governments, statistics provide much of the information which enables individuals, businesses, and governments to pursue their goals intelligently. A wide distribution of appropriate, accurate, prompt, and comprehensive intelligence is absolutely essential to the efficient functioning of a free society.[2]

Investigations by this subcommittee and by others have indicated that further significant improvement in our statistical services depends upon a higher degree of integration and coordination of our statistical programs. Indeed, there are strong indications that this is the aspect of the statistical system where progress is needed most.

The central theme of respondents in this subcommittee's compendium of views and suggestions by experts on improving our economic statistics was a recognition of the need to improve the organization of statistical data so that they can be more effectively used in analysis and policy. This general feeling was succinctly expressed by Prof. Wassily Leontief, of Harvard:

> The postwar revolution in economic programing and management techniques reinforced by unprecedented advances in data processing technology has made the traditional approach to collection, organization, and dissemination of facts and figures describing the operation of the American economy and the social conditions of the public and private life of the 180 million of American citizens completely obsolete.[3]

The staff of the Joint Economic Committee in a recent study of *Productivity, Prices, and Incomes* pointed out:

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[1] By coordination and integration is meant a system of interrelated, accessible statistics, which conform to uniform definitions, classifications, time periods and quality standards.

[2] The importance of statistics for a free society was stressed by Raymond T. Bowman, Assistant Director for Statistical Standards, Bureau of the Budget, in his address "Achieving an Integrated Federal Statistical Program," delivered to the Annual Meeting of the Federal Statistics Users Conference, Oct. 2, 1957, and reprinted in *The National Economic Accounts of the United States*, hearings before the Subcommittee on Economic Statistics, 1957, p. 70.

[3] "Improved Statistics for Economic Growth—A Compendium of Views and Suggestions from Individuals, Organizations, and Statistics Users," materials submitted to the Subcommittee on Economic Statistics of the Joint Economic Committee, July 1965, p. 90.