

OMB Gives GPO a Christmas Present—All of the President's Budget Printing

by Frederic G. Antoun, Jr.

It seems as if the battle over who will buy printing currently raging between GPO and Congress on the one hand, and OMB and the White House on the other, may never end. In a clear attempt to show that it was serious about giving agencies the option of not going through GPO under proposed FAR regulations, OMB publicly advertised that it was buying the President's Budget without going through GPO. Of course, Title 44 requires that printing must go through the GPO.

Over the last several years, GPO has done a significant portion of the President's Budget printing in-house, but has contracted out the rest to private sector printers, after competitive bidding.

From what our office has been able to determine, bids were received from both GPO and the private sector. Apparently, GPO really sharpened their pencil. On December 24, 2002, OMB notified GPO that it would receive all of the President's U.S. Budget printing next year.

OMB credits a savings of slightly over \$100,000 on the printing to the fact that it competed the work openly. (Last year the U.S. Budget printing produced through GPO and bought by GPO from private sector printers came in at slightly over \$500,000 - - this year GPO's total quote was \$387,500.) But GPO always used open, competitive bidding on this and all its print contracts.

GPO disputes that it ever gave OMB anything more than the best available prices, and attributes the price cut to differences in the work and changes in market conditions.

The good news for private sector printers is that GPO will be contracting out a significant portion of the work after open, competitive bidding. Nevertheless, there are a number of printers who feel that GPO should not be doing any of the budget printing in-house, and that it should all be contracted out. Given the fact that OMB forced GPO to compete heads up with the private sector, and GPO won, the argument that the private sector can offer a better price/quality/service combination – at least on the type of budget printing GPO is keeping in-house – may seem difficult to support. That is, if GPO's bid included all its costs.