GAO Congressional Record, 102nd Congress, Senate

1. Bill	2. Date	3. Pages
H.R. 3531	November 27, 1991	S18776-77

4. Action:

Patent and Trademark Office Authorization: Senate passed H.R. 3531, to authorize appropriations for the Patent and Trademark Office in the Department of Commerce for fiscal year 1992, clearing the measure for the President.

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PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Mr. FORD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 3531, the Patent and Trademark Office Authorization Act of 1991 just received from the House, that the bill be deemed read three times, passed and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 3531) was deemed read three times and passed.

Mr. BIDEN. Included in the Patent and Trademark Office authorization bill is a provision modifying the authority of the Commissioner of the Office. I authored this provision and believe it represents a needed change in the operations of the Office.

The provision I authored will allow the Commissioner greater authority to establish programs to help inventors demonstrate the characteristics of their patented products. The authority is rather broad, and the Commissioner is expected to assure that any new programs operate within the broader mission of the PTO. However, within that mission, there is a great deal that could be done, in a cost effective method, to help inventors.

This new authority reflects technological changes that have taken place over the years and the type of products that are of increasing importance to our economic strength. For example, under existing authority the Commissioner is limited to creating libraries to disseminate patent information. But there are limits to what can be shown on paper, or more recently computer, files on patents. The information is detailed to be sure, but the Patent and Trademark Office can help create more practical demonstrations of new products without treading upon its neutral role in patent proceedings. That is the opportunity this new authority presents.

To illustrate, PTO will now have the authority to create laboratories with equipment appropriate to demonstrating the characteristics of a particular technology, advanced ceramics or composite materials for example. The laboratories would not advocate any particular product and would be available to all who could make use of the equipment. A laboratory of this type would be of tremendous assistance to smaller companies, allowing them access to machinery and customers that they might not otherwise have. This would be a step beyond the library system that exists now, but is far short an advocacy role that PTO must avoid.

The market for most companies is not just starting to become international, it is well into that transition. It is an intensely competitive market, in which American companies need all the information they can get to remain in the forefront of developments in their industry. The new authority of the Commissioner will increase the dissemination of patent information, but in a way that is of much greater utility to inventors and customers.

I would like to thank the chairman of the Patents, Copyrights and Trademarks Subcommittee, Mr. DECONCINI, for his assistance and cooperation in seeing this provision included in the authorization bill. I also look forward to working with the Commissioner of the Patents and Trademark Office in putting this new authority to the fullest use possible.