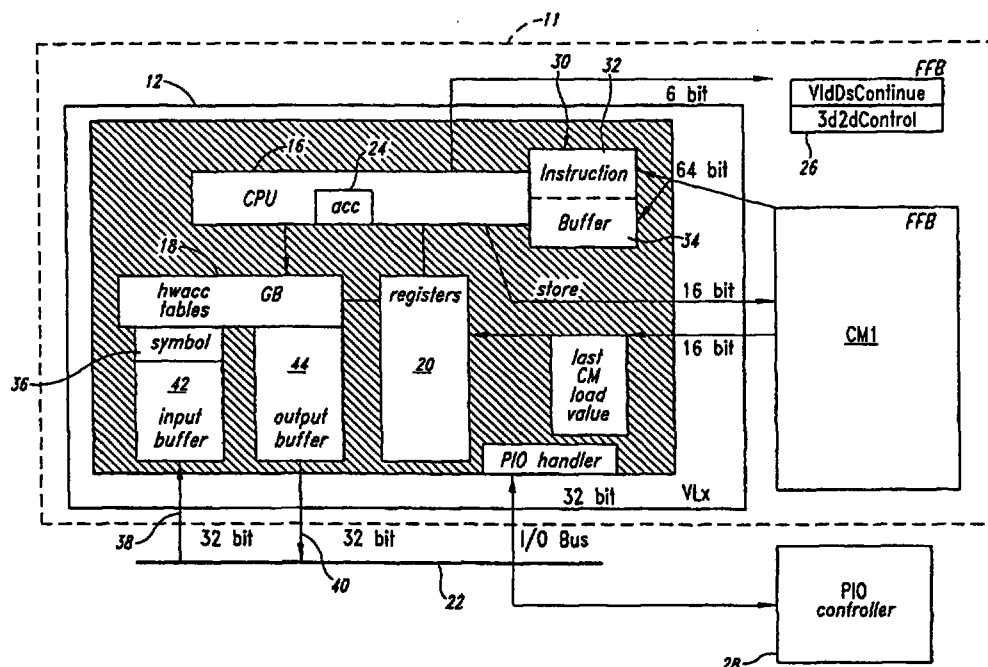




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(57) Abstract

A variable-length encode/decode processor (11) includes a central processing unit (16) and an instruction buffer (32) and a GETBITS processing engine (18) coupled to the central processing unit (16). The processor (11) can be used to encode data as variable-length symbols or to decode variable-length symbols used in MPEG protocols.