

From the Chair



Where are we now?

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Today as I sit down to type out this issue's "From the Chair" column, I am listening to Christmas music and the refrain of "It's Beginning to look a lot like Christmas" is currently running through my head. It's a bit of a joke song right now in Minnesota as there is surprisingly no snow on the ground and none forecast for the rest of 2011. South and east of here though, people are getting hammered by a holiday blizzard. Guess Mother Nature can't make up her mind as to the correct weather conditions for each geographic area. My cross country skis are getting pretty rusty here; give me my snow!

Next to me, there sits a gingerbread latte and a container of peppermint fudge—a little (okay, a lot of) sweetness to get the column-writing and creative thoughts flowing. Also, they just taste so darn good. It was a bit of a compromise in deciding on these two treats. I could have gone for the peppermint mocha and actual gingerbread. Or, perhaps a peppermint latte and gingerbread fudge.

So what does the weather, and food and drink choices have to do with a column for *DttP* other than upping my word count? Every day we are faced with choices, ones that we can control and others that we can try to control. If I thought it would help any, I would be doing a snow dance right now. In the case of the weather, what is given to me is what I have to deal with, so I will be taking some walks out in the crisp winter air for the upcoming holidays instead of cross country skiing through the snow drifts. It's a little bit easier with the food and drink; I can choose one path over another. Tomorrow the mocha and gingerbread might be the right combination, or perhaps I'll go with a full onslaught of peppermint and chocolate with the mocha and fudge. The choice is mine.

While trying to balance the role of chair of GODORT with my regular job of government information and regional depository librarian at the University of Minnesota, the choices I must make have not been easy. I'm sure past chairs would say the same thing. But this year there seems to be a new underlying tension that I have not noticed in years past, regarding the future of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), and the future of GODORT. In each I have a role as do other GODORT members.

A question I get more and more is "why isn't GODORT making a choice on a stance about the future of the FDLP

discussions and on these individual initiatives?" and "why isn't GODORT jumping into the fray as ACRL has with their recent opinion?" My answer continues to be, based on the many discussions that have occurred over the past couple years at the annual conferences and midwinter meetings as well as at Federal Depository Library Conference meetings and in individual correspondence with members, how can a group that is so divided take a stance on this issue? Those who want to take a stance want it to be a stance that favors their own opinion (normal human instincts). In an organization with so many variations of opinions, it is impossible to move forward with a cohesive stance without some faction of GODORT crying foul.

The thing is this difference of opinion isn't something that came up in the year or two with the advancement of these initiatives. This has been building for years. GODORT has not been able to offer a "future of government information" stance at the round table level for years. With this comes the inevitable perception that GODORT no longer owns the conversation within ALA. However, this may also be a sign that GODORT has helped raise the profile of government information on national and local levels.

Until recently, ALA's view on government information was left in the hands of government documents librarians—principally members of GODORT. We fought to show our relevance within our libraries and it was not as big a step to show our relevance within our library association. We had the background and the knowledge to work on resolutions and focus on issues relevant to print and digital government publications collections. This is no longer the case. Other groups have rightly joined in the conversation with their own opinions. Some members of GODORT are not happy that the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) offered an opinion on the recent decisions of the Superintendent of Documents. Guess what? ACRL is a division and it has the right to issue its own opinions and many depository libraries are academic libraries with members in ACRL.

For years we wanted library directors and deans to notice the government publications many of us hold in our libraries. We have fought to be held to the same level of cataloging and access that other collections in the libraries are and we were able to get their attention. The past couple of years, the Government Printing Office (GPO) has deliberately

invited library directors and deans to the depository library conferences. At the recent depository library conference, the number of libraries that mentioned they were cataloging their legacy collections was much higher than what I have heard in the past. Directors are putting resources into creating greater access to their print collections. On the other hand, some directors are questioning even more why there is a need for their print collections and the financial obligation and staff support to support it. The point is, because of these larger issues, opinions, and conversations, government documents are on the radar of library administrators—many of whom are members of ALA.

What then are we as GODORT members going to do about these issues? Personally I don't see us as a group coming together any time soon on a uniform stance regarding the current issues within the FDLP. However, we are the Government Documents Round Table. While depository libraries and their issues are tied to the organization, we have to be more than that. We cannot get bogged down in being associated with only the FDLP. That leaves us with making GODORT more flexible and representative of the role of librarians who work to provide access to government information so that we can strengthen the connections within our parent organization, the ALA, and within our own libraries, and not be seen as that group that can't decide what it thinks about the future of the FDLP.

This means we must look at our organization and where we want to go into the future. As I have mentioned in my previous columns, GODORT has a Strategic Plan (wikis.ala.org/godort/images/f/fd/GodortStrategicPlan_Final.doc) and this is a focus of my year as chair. Going back to my first column, I mentioned briefly the key five- and ten-year goals of the plan. Below are the five-year goals again with some information on how GODORT is working on these areas.

Goal Area I: Open Culture and Goal Area II: Outreach

Soon the GODORT Education Committee will be offering our first virtual training session to ALA members as a way to provide outreach and education to all members, regardless of their background. This is something GODORT has been talking about for several years and it is now becoming a reality. For this first round, several GODORT members have come forward with ideas of programs and provide the potential for this being not only an outreach opportunity but also a source of revenue. In the past, GODORT's main source of income has been the pre-conference format; the virtual webinar and workshops bring us to a higher level of visibility

within ALA and the potential to increase GODORT's revenue.

In addition, this year GODORT is endorsing programs from several other sections of ALA, including MAGIRT (The Nuts and Bolts of Map Scanning: Building Your Map Scanning Toolbox) and the RUSA History Section (Mining the Gold from the 1940 Census). GODORT has also endorsed an as yet unnamed Committee on Legislation, Subcommittee on E-Government Services program on e-government use in workforce recovery. The GODORT program will look at Resource Description and Access (RDA) from not only the technical side, but also from the public side of government information, both of which cross over with many other areas of ALA.

Goal Area III: Membership and Goal Area V: Structure (Committees/Meetings)

This spring there will be bylaws measures on the ballot to provide flexibility in creating and updating committees, task forces, and discussion groups within GODORT to allow for more timely organizational change to meet the in-time needs with regards to timely issues, regardless of the topic. These changes focus on simplifying the *Bylaws* and moving information to the *Policies and Procedures Manual*. These changes do not look at taking away any current Committee or Task Force structure; rather, they allow for an easier-to-read document that will give members and those interested in GODORT a better sense of what we are about and how they can participate.

Goal Area IV: Create a more balanced focus on all government information

While the focus of many GODORT members is on the federal information front, GODORT still needs to look at the international and state and local level of government information. As government information access is looked at on one level of government, it translates into similar focuses at other levels. I think all of us can discuss the budgetary changes at the city, county, state, and regional level that affect us just as much as they do on the national level. As GODORT moves forward, this is definitely an area that needs support.

These are small, but strong, steps that I feel will help GODORT be seen as more than just depository libraries or the group that can name esoteric governmental agencies just by their acronyms. The world of government information continues to grow, the involvement of groups other than GODORT in deciding the boundaries of that world will continue to grow, and GODORT needs to be able to grow with it.