

From the Chair

Aimée C. Quinn

Autumn is here, and with it come the midterm elections. I find one of the most exciting parts of working in documents is the diversity of material produced by the government that leads to the incredible range of questions from the academic community and the public. Yet I have always been puzzled by the lack of general knowledge of issues whenever elections come around. I can hardly remember the last time I talked with anyone who was well-versed on issues in their own community, much less in their state or the nation.

What are citizens talking about this year? A professor in the University of Illinois, Chicago, College of Social Work recently returned from doing field research in Mississippi and said that the only thing anyone wanted to talk about was the proposed constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. But in Chicago it's a dead issue. Here, the big issue is immigration, and we have marches and protests blocking traffic all over the metro region. Yet on a recent trip to Phoenix, where I would have expected this to be on everyone's mind, I heard nothing on that issue. Perhaps it was just considered too hot for polite conversation? Everyone seems fixated on whatever is being discussed on their favorite shows or blog, or whichever way the political winds are blowing the strongest where they live. So I would urge us all as documents librarians to ask ourselves, how can we help our communities get a broader grasp of the issues that affect us all?

To that end, GODORT is developing an advocacy workshop that will help us assist users to communicate with our elected or appointed leaders. We hope to develop an advocacy network of librarians who want to work together to develop their skills. We need to pool our energy, enthusiasm, and expertise, not only to provide leadership for our patrons, but to better prepare and motivate ourselves to communicate our opinions to our government leaders.

GODORT is all about being involved and helping our patrons get involved. As I write this column, I am struck by the fact that the EPA has begun their plan to close their libraries regardless of what the scientific, environmental, and library communities have said and in spite of the fact that the budget cuts they feared have not been approved. I truly do believe we can change the path of government—but only if we choose to get involved. Did you know that GPO received only fifteen comments—less than one for every hundred depository libraries—on their “Essential Titles List” proposal? The same handful of librarians can be counted on to send comments and, I admit, I am a sporadic responder myself. Of course, GODORT wrote a letter to the GPO outlining our concerns with the proposal. This letter is available on our web site at www.ala.org/ala/godort/communications/letters2006/ETLfinal1.pdf.

There was a Govdoc-1 message recently that gave the URL to the Maine Military Historical Society archive, where Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain sent his July 6, 1863, *After Action Report* describing the Battle of Gettysburg engagement of his forces. He prefaced his report by stating:

The inspiration of a noble cause involving human interests wide and far, enables men to do things they did not dream themselves capable of before, and which they were not capable of alone. The consciousness of belonging, vitally, to something beyond individuality; of being part of a personality that reaches we know not where, in space and time, greatens the heart to the limit of the soul's ideal, and builds out the supreme of character.¹

I believe Chamberlain's words touch directly on how we, as members of the documents community, can work together to make great changes in the public access to government information.

In closing, I would like to encourage all readers to make a tax-deductible contribution to support the W. David Rozkuszka Scholarship.² This award benefits a library master's degree candidate who is currently working with government documents in a library. As always, I look forward to hearing your thoughts. ☘

References

1. Chamberlain, Joshua L. "Monument Dedication Ceremony, Gettysburg, PA. October 3, 1889." In After Action Report (CSI reprint). Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: U.S. Army, Combined Arms Center.
www.cgsc.army.mil/carl/resources/csi/Chamberlain/CHAMBERLAIN.asp.
2. Check may be addressed to ALA/GODORT with a note in the memo field "Rozkuszka Scholarship."
Please send checks to the GODORT Treasurer: Jill Moriearty (2007) General Reference, Marriott Library, University of Utah, 295 South 1500 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84112-0860.