



Developments in Shaping the FDLP— GODORT's Role

Geoff Swindells

In my last column, I addressed some of the goals outlined in GODORT's new strategic plan, outlined some preliminary thoughts on my vision for the future, and promised a more detailed discussion on implementing the strategic plan in this issue of *DttP*. However, events have a way of interrupting plans, and instead I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about some recent developments related to the future shape of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP).

The developments that occasion these remarks are the announcement that the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) has awarded the FDLP consultant contract to Ithaka S+R and the discussion drafts of changes to Title 44 of the *U.S. Code* distributed by the regional depository librarians. Both Roger Schonfeld, manager of research at Ithaka S+R, and Barbie Selby, regional federal depository librarian at the University of Virginia, have reached out to me in my capacity as chair and asked for GODORT's active participation in these two initiatives.

While both of these efforts are important, the consultant contract is the most broad reaching and time-sensitive. GPO has contracted Ithaka to work with all relevant stakeholders, and to recommend a model (or models) for the future FDLP that are durable, sustainable, and ensure permanent public access to federal government information collections and services. These recommendations will be issued during the first quarter of 2011. The proposed revisions to Title 44, by contrast, are much more limited, and target regional operations under sections 1911 and 1912. The working group of regional librarians has produced three different discussion drafts for consideration.

In my brief conversations with Roger and Barbie, I've been careful not to represent any particular position related to the future of the FDLP, as that is not my role, but I have assured both of them that I will do whatever I can to foster dialogue on the program among our membership and have offered to assist them in whatever way that I can.

I think that this approach is consistent with the goal in our strategic plan that states, "GODORT members are the leading advocates for access, dissemination and awareness of government information and actively work with other ALA groups and organizations beyond the library community." Nevertheless, I must admit that I approach this

issue with some trepidation, because there have been times when GODORT has been so closely identified with the FDLP as to crowd out substantive discussion of other levels, types, and sources of government information. No one is more aware of this than I am. Despite my having worked in federal depository libraries for most of my career, and having served on the Depository Library Council to the Public Printer, I have often been frustrated with the widespread tendency within the profession to reduce "government information librarians" to "depository librarians," and to further contract the scope of our work to that of "federal depository librarians." I said as much in my last column.

This was never an adequate representation of our field, and given the rapid globalization of our political culture along with the advent of new forms of information dissemination, it is perhaps even less true today than in the past. I'll leave it to political science to chart the precise contours of our post-Westphalian world; however, I think that I can say with some confidence that sub-national, international and foreign government information play a more important role in domestic politics than ever before, and that to remain a relevant policy actor in this changing information environment, GODORT (and by extension, ALA) must embrace a more inclusive, less parochial, policy agenda. That said, as I also noted in my last column, this round table must continue to advocate for robust and responsive depository library programs, and the FDLP (or something very much like the FDLP) is an essential component of our democratic polity. The key here is to find a way to recognize GODORT's vital advocacy role while at the same time resisting the tendency to conflate GODORT with the FDLP (or with some particular version of the FDLP).

Given a target date of early 2011 for the Ithaka report, it is essential that GODORT members engage with these issues during the months leading up to the Midwinter Meeting, so by the time you read this column this conversation should be well underway. I have asked Stephanie Braunstein, our Federal Documents Task Force Coordinator, and the co-chairs of our Legislation Committee, Ellen Simmons and Kay Cassell, to work with me to create a forum on ALA Connect, and to help me determine the best way to foster an open and civil dialogue on the future of a program of vital interest to our membership.

I have also reached out to other leaders within ALA

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and to our sister organizations the Association of Research Libraries, the Special Libraries Association, and the American Association of Law Libraries, as well as to Suzanne Sears, the chair of Depository Library Council, and to Judy Russell, Dean of Libraries at the University of Florida and chair of the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) Deans' FDLP Task Force. A robust and

sustainable FDLP is in the interest of all stakeholders, and I hope to broaden the conversation to include as many interests and perspectives as possible in our discussions.

That's all for now. In my next column, I will return to a more detailed discussion of the strategic plan. In the meantime, I can always be reached at geoff.swindells@gmail.com.

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