



Where do we go from here?

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As I write this message in early March 2018, we are on the cusp of the introduction of the major legislative reform affecting access to government information.¹ A draft bill, written by the Committee on House Administration, is expected to be introduced that would make substantial changes to the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) and possibly to the agency that administers it, the US Government Publishing Office (GPO).

Many of the changes to the FDLP proposed in draft reflect principles endorsed by the GODORT Steering Committee in August 2017, which were incorporated into the American Library Association's Title 44 reform position statement. Perhaps in part because the FDLP serves the public with minimal fanfare and virtually no recognition, these measures were developed in a bipartisan process with the input of groups including the American Library Association (through the Washington Office), the American Association of Law Libraries, and the Association of Research Libraries. Librarians and others testified before the Committee on House Administration in September 2017; GPO officials testified over the summer and responded to Congressional requests for information in consultation with the Depository Library Council (DLC).

However, other draft provisions would substantially revise GPO's authority to oversee federal information dissemination. Some of these changes are progressive in that they update provisions originating from the Printing Act of 1895. Others reflect increasing government privatization and decentralization; for example, the scope of print procurement that federal offices can undertake independent of GPO is expanded. A few provisions might be considered regressive, including those that rename the agency head, currently "Director of the Government Publishing Office," back to "Public Printer" and further stipulates that the appointee shall be a graphic communication professional who will serve in the post for a term of ten years.

We do not know if there will be ample time to gather and consider useful public input as to whether reforms to GPO's mandate and operations, if introduced, are in the best interest of public access to government information. Such reforms and changes may go forward (or not) and be approved by the House of Representatives (or not) for reasons that are driven by politics, not policy.² For those who have worked on these issues

since the past summer (and in many cases, much longer than that), this is a great disappointment.

The GODORT Principals statement is excerpted in this issue both for general information and to make a point. For the most part, our statement focuses on structural changes to the FDLP itself. We did not recommend changes to GPO's other operations, or the priorities and administrative decision-making of any number of participating libraries, or the work of librarians and library staff who provide access to the public on an everyday basis. Yet all of these factors must come together for the FDLP.

As library folks who care about government information, we would do very well to look beyond our self-imposed boundaries. Too many draw a hard-and-fast line between publications and records, or insist that government data is too different from government documents to be within the scope of our work, or arbitrarily decide that we can only provide shared, persistent access to publications if GPO first catalogs them. I am concerned that these barriers cause us to miss the larger picture, which is that work happens in libraries every day that blithely disregards every one of these distinctions, and many more I have not identified here.

The great challenge of our day is to push past what we think we can each do individually. Let's work with archivists and records managers, let's work with metadata creators and digital preservationists, let's work with researchers and teachers and learners across disciplinary boundaries. Let's work with our communities and members of the public, especially those whose needs and interests are so often marginalized in traditional library collections and services. Let's work with our government partners, yes, but also with nonprofits and advocacy groups. And let's learn to listen better and then make our voices heard—in our libraries, in our professional communities, and in all of the work that touches ours.

The past year has shown us that government information is relevant and that the public cares about it. It's up to us to make the connections that can change everything.

Notes

1. My discussion reflects the 2/22/2018 draft; it is possible that the bill as introduced will be altered from this version.
2. For a sense of what this process has been like, the best comparison I can offer is available at the following link: <https://goo.gl/eGyxvY>.