

Senate Considers the Future of the Federal Depository Library Program

On June 18 and 19, the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration conducted a two-day hearing concerning the role of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) in the 21st century. Members of the Committee heard from a wide array of witnesses during the two days including members of the library, federal, and academic communities.

Representatives of both the library community and the Government Printing Office (GPO) were included on a series of panels. These panelists included Wayne P. Kelley, Superintendent of Documents for U.S. Government Printing Office, Daniel P. O'Mahony of Brown University, and Betty J. Turock, President of the American Library Association.

Mr. Kelley of GPO stated that the FDLP needs to be strengthened with continued focus on public access to government information. He also noted that bringing the FDLP into the 21st century requires a sufficient amount of time for libraries and government agencies alike to make the transition and the utilization of the appropriate technology.

GPO recently conducted a study to identify issues regarding the transition to a more electronic FDLP. The study included input from depository libraries, government offices, publishing agencies as well as a suggestion that a 5-7 year transition period is a reasonable time frame for a gradual transition to a more electronic FDLP. Responding to a question by Senator Warner (R-VA) regarding the costs of the transition to a more electronic FDLP, Mr. Kelley stated that after consultation with librarians, federal agencies, and others, it was determined that agencies and libraries are not yet ready to go fully electronic, and that the cost to libraries and users would be high.

Dr. O'Mahony, Government Documents Coordinator at Brown University, echoed many of Mr. Kelley's remarks. He was quick to point out that there is a need for "cautious optimism" in planning the transition to electronic formats. In his statement, he stressed the need for a centralized, coordinated program and the need for stricter enforcement of policies.

Testifying on behalf of the library community (ALA, ARL, AALL, and SLA), ALA President Betty Turock highlighted issues relating to the transition to a more network-based program and the critical role of libraries in the provision of information to many communities. Dr. Turock pointed out that digital formats and paper are not mutually exclusive. She was in agreement with the other witnesses with regard to the 5-7 year time frame but noted that the transition will require a continuing commitment by participating libraries and agencies.

Other panelists included Dr. William A. Wulf, Computer Science Professor at the University of Virginia, Dr. Dennis Galletta, Associate Professor of Business Administration at the Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business of the University of Pittsburgh, and Jeanne Hurley Simon, Chairperson of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Sciences (NCLIS).

Dr. Wulf's testimony focused on the rapid rate of technological growth and the need for libraries and agencies to invest in new technologies. Dr. Wulf stated that although the exact rate of change is impossible to predict, libraries and agencies should proceed with deliberate speed and experiment with

new forms of electronic publication.

Dr. Dennis Galletta advised members of the Committee that it is too soon to rely fully on the Internet for access to information. He also highlighted the fact that the World Wide Web has several difficulties, such as slow and unpredictable speeds and frequent Uniform Resource Locator (URL) changes.

Jeanne Hurley Simon of NCLIS stated that the members of the National Commission believe that recent advances in electronic information and communications technologies can increase and improve public access to and use of government information. She also stressed the need for reliable and current statistics on libraries' use of the Internet and/or other networks. In response to a question by Senator Warner regarding the Commission's view of the use of technology for better access, Ms. Simon stated that not only must the needs of the users be addressed, but also the needs of depository libraries must be taken into consideration.

- [Ann E. Doty](#), *ARL Research Assistant for Federal Relations*

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