

**Statement of Dr. James H. Billington
The Librarian of Congress
before the
Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census and the National Archives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Mr. Chairman, Mr. McHenry, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to appear before the Subcommittee. It is a pleasure to be here today with Smithsonian Secretary, Wayne Clough, and with the new Archivist, David Ferriero. We wish him well in his new job, look forward to working with him, and have already begun to establish what I am confident will be a good relationship.

The Library of Congress is the oldest of these three institutions represented here today. We have long had a cordial and productive relationship with both the National Archives and Records Administration and the Smithsonian Institution. Their great collections and national missions generally complement ours as taxpayer-funded Federal repositories for different aspects of American history and culture, and stewards of world renowned collections with expert curatorial staffs. We also face similar challenges, which include acquiring and preserving material, making that material accessible and useful, and welcoming both researchers and the general public.

Library of Congress Mission and History

The Library of Congress is America's oldest federal cultural institution. It operates within the legislative branch of government; the first Joint Committee of the House and Senate in 1802 was the Joint Committee on the Library of Congress. The Library's mission is to make its resources available to the Congress and the American people and to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for future generations. For more than 200 years, the Library has proven itself adaptable and innovative in accommodating the growing needs of the Congress and of the American people. The Library of Congress uses its strategic plan to guide it in fulfilling its broad mission. We consult frequently with and are responsible to our Congressional oversight and appropriations committees, which provide invaluable counsel and support as we carry out our responsibilities.

Our vast and diverse collections have been built by the Congress around the amazingly rich personal collection of Thomas Jefferson, whose ideal of a universal collection and a knowledge-based democracy has been our guiding philosophy. We owe everything the Library of Congress is today to the people's representatives – the Congress of the United States – the greatest patron of a library in the history of the world.

The Library of Congress has grown into a national institution and a world resource of unrivaled dimensions. The Library of Congress is by far the largest, most comprehensive and multi-formatted library in the world covering some 470 languages, stored on more than 650 miles of shelving and relentlessly adding 10,000 new items daily.

Largely because we are the sole custodians of copyright deposit, the Library of Congress is a unique storehouse of American private sector creativity. Remarkable treasures are found within the Library's collections: we have 4,000-year-old Sumerian clay tablets; the only recording ever made of the world's oldest Christian music from Coptic Africa; the first map ever made of the Western Hemisphere; 15th century illuminated manuscripts; Jefferson's rough draft of the Declaration of Independence with edits by Franklin and Adams; Lincoln's two variant versions of the Gettysburg Address; and the world's largest and most varied collection of music, maps, and movies.

The Subcommittee has asked me to discuss how the Library of Congress meets the needs of its varied constituencies in fulfilling its mission. We have established clear priorities for serving each constituency and I believe we have struck a good balance in meeting our responsibilities.

Serving the Congress

The top priority of the Library of Congress is, and will remain, serving the research needs of the Congress. The Congressional Research Service provides objective and comprehensive research and analysis on policy issues before the Congress. Seven hundred CRS policy specialists and librarians over the last year responded to nearly 900,000 research and reference requests. Our Law Library has unparalleled collections in international and comparative law and serves as the foreign legal research arm of the Congress. Members of Congress and staff have unique borrowing privileges from the Library of Congress and frequently use the Members Room in the Jefferson Building for meetings and conferences.

Serving the American People

The Library of Congress's other major priority is serving the research needs of the American people. Established in 1800 as Congress's library, we also serve a broader constituency. Particularly after the act of Congress to centralize copyright deposit uniquely at the

Library in 1870, we became the *de facto* national library. Last year we: responded to well over half a million public reference requests in our 21 reading rooms; circulated 22 million copies of braille and recorded books and magazines to some 500,000 patrons through our National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped; hosted 129 leading scholars from around the world at the privately-funded Kluge Center for residential research using the Library's collections; and, recorded well over 6 billion hits on the Library's heavily used educational Web site which contains nearly 16 million digital files of American history and culture.

When the Congress moved its library out of the Capitol into its own new Jefferson Building in 1897, the architecture was designed to be a public showcase projecting American optimism near the turn of the century where visitors could come and be inspired by the quest for knowledge. The original interior design was divided almost equally between space designated for the collections and research centered on the Main Reading Room, and inspirational visitor space, including the Great Hall, and a ring of galleries and pavilions dedicated to exhibits and displays featuring the Library's collections. The Congress was very interested in the plans for the building. Before it opened, the Joint Committee on the Library held hearings about collections and operations of the Library of Congress. Members discussed the plans for gallery space on the second floor dedicated for exhibits of Library materials for the public and toured the building prior to opening to look at these spaces.

When it opened, the Jefferson Building received overwhelming approval from both the Congress and the American public. It is still considered today – particularly after Congress restored it in the 1990's – one of the finest public buildings and most beautiful interior spaces in America. With the introduction in 2008-2009 of large-scale interactive enhancements of the public spaces, and new popular exhibits, the Library has reinvigorated the original use of the building and attracted new visitors through the passageway directly connecting the Jefferson Building and the new Capitol Visitor Center. At the same time, we have modernized facilities for scholars and designated a building entrance solely for the use of researchers.

Even in an increasingly digital age with exponential growth in remote access to the Library's collections, our multiple reading rooms continue to serve researchers with both general information and access to one-of-a-kind primary source materials. One of the most spectacular public spaces in America is the ornate Main Reading Room, the heart of the Library's general research and reference activities and a monument to the written word. Twenty other reading rooms serve a more specialized clientele, with access to rich collections representing specific regions of the world, subject formats, and audio and visual materials which often cannot be accessed anywhere else.

After an initial decline at the start of the Internet age, overall readership in our reading rooms has stabilized, and we have noticed over the past year increased usage of the Manuscript, Music, and American Folklife Center reading rooms, with a trend toward more in-person direct reference service. Just a few weeks ago we opened a new Young Readers Center, a family-friendly space with children's books and internet access where visitors can go to enjoy the

reading experience with their family. Using new interactive technology, we have developed innovative means to engage visitors, particularly youth, in new and more active ways at the Library of Congress.

Our magnificent Thomas Jefferson Building has become an even more popular destination for visitors since we opened new popular exhibitions: Creating the U.S., Jefferson's restored Library; and the Lincoln Bicentennial exhibit – all featuring priceless one-of-a-kind Presidential materials. During the last year, 1.75 million people have either used the Library for on-site research or toured our facilities, including 34,000 Congressional constituents who have taken specifically arranged tours through Members of Congress. Last year's opening of the passageway from the Capitol Visitor Center to the Jefferson Building has significantly increased the number of visitors.

Digital Initiatives

The world is currently experiencing an unprecedented revolution in the generation and communication of creativity, knowledge, and information caused by the explosion of digital material. The Library of Congress is superimposing new digital collections and services onto traditional analog collections, while preserving the human values of the older book culture that helped create the free, open and knowledge-based democracy we serve.

The Library has been a leader in transforming its collections and services into an active archive of digital information and creativity that can be shared electronically throughout the world. We have been an innovator in posting free, high quality content, with clear curatorial explanation, on the Internet. The Library learned how to make digital material accessible early in 1995 with our online American Memory Project, which became part of the National Digital Library; followed by the THOMAS legislative database; and, earlier this year, a World Digital Library with items from all 192 countries in UNESCO.

The Library is also using new social media, including YouTube, FaceBook, Twitter, and Flickr, to attract new audiences both to enjoy and to learn from our collections. With our online resources, students at all levels and teachers can use our primary source documents for educational use.

Cooperation with the National Archives

The National Archives and Records Administration and the Library of Congress have many similarities in organization and mission. Because of its focus on the records of the Federal government, the National Archives is more specialized in its collections than the Library of Congress.

Beginning in 1921, the Library of Congress preserved and displayed for visitors (with a brief interruption during World War II, when they were safeguarded at Ft. Knox) final versions of the two most iconic documents of American history – the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Following the establishment of the National Archives in 1934 and the subsequent enactment of the Federal Records Act, the Congress instructed the Library to transfer both documents to the custody of the National Archives, as the repository for official U.S. government records, where they have been since 1952. The Archives and the Library both share custody of presidential papers, with the Library holding on Capitol Hill the papers of 23 presidents and the Archives administering the 13 libraries and museums of recent presidents beginning with Herbert Hoover.

The Library and Archives cooperate on specific projects such as the National Digital Infrastructure Information and Preservation Program (NDIIPP), which was created by the Congress within the Library in 2000, to develop a long term national strategy to collect, preserve, and make accessible the most important material available only in digital form. As part of NDIIPP, the Library leads a federal working group on digitization guidelines and standards with 14 agencies, including NARA and the Smithsonian.

The Library and the Archives collaborate on tapes of House and Senate floor proceedings with the Archives maintaining the preservation copy and the Library retaining a reference copy of the proceedings at our massive new Packard Campus for audio-visual conservation in Culpeper, Virginia.

Cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian Institution and Library of Congress enjoy an even longer collaborative relationship dating back to the mid 1800's. Shortly after its founding in 1846, the first methodical attempt at cooperative cataloging ever undertaken was proposed by the Smithsonian and applied to the Library. The Smithsonian originally shared copyright responsibilities before it became an exclusive Library responsibility and the Smithsonian transferred its original library to the Library of Congress in 1866.

Both institutions have good relations and staff communicate frequently about shared collection interests and work closely on preservation issues. We occasionally lend material to each other for exhibitions, frequently cooperate on folklife programs, and the Smithsonian remains one of the Library's largest borrowers of materials for the use of its scholars and researchers.

This year, the Smithsonian and the Library were asked by the Congress to carry out a joint project to collect video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials of individuals who participated in the Civil Rights movement.

Conclusion

The United States is unique in its ability to combine extraordinarily stable governing institutions with an amazing capacity for constant innovation in its private sector. Moreover, America has a great capacity to add without subtracting – new people, new ideas, new technologies.

The Library of Congress reflects this notable capacity of Americans constantly to change and adapt to the new, without jettisoning the old. We have embraced a series of new media and technologies to collect and share with ever broader audiences the riches of the world's largest collection of knowledge. We have demonstrated in many ways over the last twenty years, through innovation, technology and our unparalleled collections, how to wisely use tax dollars to reach a new generation of Americans by helping them make their own connections. We must continue in the future to lead by taking an activist approach and use new techniques to share our riches while at the same time balancing this imperative with our traditional artifactual role as America's, and increasingly the world's, storehouse of knowledge.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to discuss how the Library of Congress defines and fulfills its mission to serve the Congress and the American people.