



**The United States Federal Depository Library Program:
Been Here since 1813 and Determined to Be Here as Long as
the People Need Government Information to Participate
Fully as Citizens**

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Abstract:

The United States Federal Depository Program (FDLP) has been in existence since the early 19th Century as a mechanism for providing free retrieval of information published by the government at citizens' expense. Although the program has served as a model of government transparency and citizen access to government publications for so many years, it is now under pressure to continue to provide that access in spite of significant budget cuts at all levels of the system, from the creators of the information to the direct providers—libraries found all over the country. This paper will discuss the history of the program, some of the challenges it has always faced, and the newest challenges that appear to be threatening the program's very existence and bringing about the possible demise of truly free access to our government's publications.

Introduction & History

In an effort to provide a transparent government and an informed citizenry for a new democracy, in 1813 Congress passed a joint resolution¹ to ensure the distribution of printed legislative materials to selected state and university libraries as well as to some historical societies (United States Government Printing Office [USGPO]). Starting in 1814, when the American Antiquarian Society became “the first non-governmental body to receive government distributed publications,” (Hernon, et al, 1985) the U.S. Congress has continued to pass laws to insure citizens’ access to information about the government’s activities.

As the country grew in population and mass, so too did the budding depository² library program. More congressional actions were taken to encourage and facilitate a formal system whereby government information could be made accessible to those who served in government as well as to citizens at large. For example, The Printing Act of 1852³ resulted in the appointment of the Superintendent of Public Printing who reported to the Secretary of the Interior. By 1859, there were twelve designated depository libraries; and subsequent changes to the law mandated that depository library designation be made by Congressional district (Griffin & Ahrens, 2004).

In 1895, the General Printing Act (GPA)⁴ consolidated existing laws governing the printing, binding and distribution of government publications. The Office of the Superintendent of Documents was transferred to the Government Printing Office (GPO) and charged with directing efforts for bibliographic control, distributing public documents, selling these documents to the public, and administering the depository library program. This legislation

¹ Resolution for the Printing of an Additional Number of the Journals of Congress, and of the Documents Published Under Their Order, 13th Congress, December 13, 1813, 3 Stat. 140.

² Note use of the term “depository” as distinguished from the term “repository.” The terms are different in the sense of temporary versus permanent storage. In the context of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), a depository library is one which houses, processes, and makes available to patrons those publications sent to the library by the government agency. Ownership of the publications does not pass to the library; on the contrary, the publications remain the property of the federal government which retains the right to request that the library send the publications back to GPO if necessary—hence depository=temporary and repository=permanent.

³ “An Act to provide for executing the Public Printing, and establishing the Prices thereof, and for other Purposes,” 10 Stat. 30, August 26, 1852.

⁴ “An Act Providing for the public printing and binding and the distribution of public documents,” 28 Stat. 601 et seq., January 12, 1895.

attempted to centralize government printing under the GPO (prior to this law, the printing of documents was still dispersed among private printers).

The GPA also stipulated that a catalog of government publications be prepared by the Superintendent of Documents on the first day of the month to identify publications printed the month before in order to keep the public and libraries informed of publications that the national government issued. This mandate marked the beginning of the *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications* (MOCAT) that began publication in 1895. This legislation clarified how depository status could be conferred to a particular library—through designation by a member of Congress (see above) or by type of library; for example, state libraries, libraries in executive departments and libraries of the military academies were all eligible to be depositories under this law.

In 1923 the concept of selective depositories was introduced. The libraries now had more control over their collections and could decide what categories of documents they wanted to receive. The Depository Library Act of 1962⁵ made it possible for the U.S. House of Representatives members to name two selective depository libraries per Congressional district and Senators to name two regional depositories per state, and thus the number of federal depositories was increased. Regional depositories were charged with maintaining collections permanently, providing reference service and interlibrary loan and assisting other depositories in the disposition of unwanted publications. Selective depositories could get rid of documents after 5 years with the permission of the regional depository. The 1962 law stated that the depositories should be “maintained so as to be accessible to the public.” Two other modifications to the program via the 1962 law were that it added the highest appellate court of each state and the accredited law schools to the list of depositories.

In 1977 GPO received permission for microfilm distribution to depository libraries and later began to distribute CD-ROMs. In the 1990s, the Internet changed everything; and in 1993,

⁵ “An Act to revise the laws relating to depository libraries” or the “Depository Library Act of 1962,” 76 Stat. 352, August 9, 1962.

the GPO Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act⁶ was passed. GPO Access, which hosted information on the Federal Government and the federal government documents, was created; and electronic products began to be distributed to depository libraries. Not all publications of the US government are sent to the depositories. In 1995 federal agencies began to publish government publications on their websites; and THOMAS, developed and maintained by the Library of Congress, was launched, providing access to a vast array of information about Congress and legislation. The Legislative Branch Appropriations Act of 1996⁷ directed GPO to reassess the program's use of electronic publishing and dissemination technologies. It required GPO to examine the functions and services of the program, identify measures that were necessary to ensure a successful transition to a more electronically based program, and to prepare a strategic plan for such a transition. Slowly and then more quickly the number of print documents dropped and more documents were available only in digital format. The E-Government Act of 2002⁸ improved public access to government publications through the Internet. Users began to consult online versions of documents first and to use other sources of government information such as Google which expanded the amount of government publications made available. As of 2009, more than 97% of new government documents were available electronically, and over three-fourths of them were only available digitally (Ithaka S+R, 2009).

In 2006, the Depository Library Council (DLC), a body of fifteen members of the Federal Depository Library (FDL) community appointed for three-year staggered terms by the Public Printer to advise GPO on issues pertinent to the FDLP, developed an updated vision statement for the FDLP. Goals included "providing multiple access points, providing access in appropriate

⁶ "An Act To establish in the Government Printing Office a means of enhancing electronic public access to a wide range of Federal electronic information" or the "Government Printing Office Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act of 1993," 107 Stat. 112, June 8, 1993.

⁷ "An Act Making appropriations for the Legislative Branch for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1996, and for other purposes," 109 Stat. 514, November 19, 1995.

⁸ "An Act To enhance the management and promotion of electronic Government services and processes by establishing a Federal Chief Information Officer within the Office of Management and Budget, and by establishing a broad framework of measures that require using Internet-based information technology to enhance citizen access to Government information and services, and for other purposes," 116 Stat. 2899, December 17, 2002.

formats, ensuring access to digital materials, expanding training, creating descriptive tools, enhancing collaborations, and expanding awareness of the FDLP” (Jaeger, 2010).

Problems at the Source

Those goals did not come from a vacuum. On the contrary, the DLC’s recommendations came from its awareness of the challenges facing the program going into the 21st century. These twenty first century issues include providing public access to all government documents; assuring the preservation of digital documents, both born digital and digitized from tangible formats; discouraging the privatization of information (when privatization means less free public access); and developing new models of service based primarily on the increased availability of digital government publications.

While on the one hand, our government fosters initiatives to provide improved transparency of government via increased access to government information, on the other hand, the ongoing economic downturn that began around 2007 is negatively impacting the successful carrying out of those initiatives due to lack of adequate government funding. At the same time that the Obama administration announced the Open Government Initiative to direct the agencies and departments to make their operations more transparent, spending cuts became a reality. Cuts in services, publications, and websites became commonplace responses to dwindling resources. The GPO budget was reduced with no funding allotted for the expansion of the functionality of GPO’s Federal Digital System (FDsys), the much needed and anticipated successor to GPO Access (and now the federal government’s main portal for electronic primary resource information: see <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsysinfo/aboutfdsys.htm>). Also the E-Government monies that fund the Open Government Initiative have been reduced thus threatening the development of open government sites which would compile information and make it available in a more user friendly form.

In 2011, GPO offered monetary incentives to separate from employment to as much as 15% of its workforce, leaving a comparatively very lean organization, approximately 1900 employees:

The U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) workforce is at its lowest level in the past century as a result of buyouts, early outs, and employees leaving the agency for other reasons. GPO offered buyouts and early outs to the agency's employees during the second half of calendar year 2011 as a result of overall Government cutbacks and projected reductions in appropriated funding. The buyout program targeted a reduction of 15%, or 330 employees. (GPO Reports Results of Buyouts/Earlyouts, 2012)

As of the writing of this paper, GPO is still fighting the good fight; however, other agencies—the ones that actually produce many of the prominent publications disseminated by the FDLP—are being cut to the bone as well and are being forced to eliminate entire departments that employed the authors of those publications. The best publicized case in point is that of the Census Bureau and the closing of its Statistical Compendia Branch, the office responsible for the publication of the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, published annually since 1878. This closing of such a vital branch did not just affect the print versions but the electronic versions as well. No amount of pressure from the library and general academic community changed bureaucratic minds, so the many users of this indispensable publication were left with no substitute until ProQuest announced that it would publish the *Statistical Abstract* online and that Bernan would publish it in paper. While the news that private publishers are planning to revive the classic title is welcome, those libraries and other research institutions that need this publication will be forced to pay considerable sums of money for a publication that was, until recently, essentially free and at a time when most library budgets are being slashed as well. The option of just not buying this title at all is highly impractical because without the work of the Census Bureau statisticians to compile and explicate the myriad statistics for the general user, the user must gather

together those statistics from many different sources in order to approximate the same results formerly easily found in a single well-organized volume. In addition, The Statistical Abstract, as published by the Census Bureau, included a number of tables utilizing information that was made available to the Census Bureau through agreements with non-government and/or private entities. A commercial publisher would need to make its own agreements with these entities, and those agreements could conceivably cost the commercial publishers money that would have to be recouped via pricing structures.

Problems on the Ground: FDLs in Transition

What do all of these changes mean for our libraries? Libraries have always adjusted their resources and services to their community of users, but due to the recent global economic crisis, adapting is becoming more of a struggle for FDLP libraries. The example described above of having to purchase the *Statistical Abstract* is only one small instance of how bigger fiscal problems affect us at the local level. At that local level, both micro and macroeconomics can be felt; and many depository collections are the targets of cost-cutting initiatives.

For several years, the FDLP print and microform collection at one large American university (over 23,000 students) was located in an inviting space with computers, tables and chairs, and plenty of windows for natural light. Some of the lesser-used print collections were gradually moved to an off-site storage facility, but the staffed service desk adjacent to the main collection helped with access to those items, assistance with locating any other available government information, and the operation of the microform reading machines.

This selective FDLP library housed a deep historical collection of census materials, documents from the Department of Agriculture, topographical maps, and legal information. Use by students and professors in the graduate programs, including those offering doctorate degrees, gave added value to these particular items.

Due to remodeling of the library, a much smaller space became available elsewhere; and the print items were moved. There is only one computer station in this area, no other seating, and no windows. The microform and print items are now in separate areas of the building, and the only staff available for any type of assistance is located on another floor.

The library does, however, have a designated Government Information Librarian, who in addition to her other responsibilities, finds time to assist users with access, oversee the FDLP program, and work with the acquisitions department in making their yearly selections. As personnel costs rise, a designated Government Information Librarian is now becoming a luxury that smaller, underfunded libraries can no longer afford. The result is often that as librarians retire or take new jobs elsewhere, FDLP librarian duties are often added onto another librarian's already overburdened schedule. Details important to the smooth running of a government documents collection, such as shelf reading, marketing, preservation, and thorough service for each patron, are becoming more scarce.

For example, a smaller but very relevant FDLP university library is struggling with librarians and other staff leaving at a time when funds are not being allocated to replace them. Preservation has ceased for all print items, including government information. The Depository librarian here is also the electronics resources librarian, so his responsibilities have been split since the beginning of his employment. But with staff leaving, he has taken on other responsibilities, such as working with serials, tools to support interlibrary loan services, and other tasks that might come up on any given day. Therefore, instead of attending FDLP conferences, where he could benefit from networking and education about his documents collection, he has been spending time developing new skills so that he can better take care of the new responsibilities.

In various discussion groups at recent American Library Association (ALA) conferences, FDLP librarians have complained that their university boards and administrations believe print materials are longer needed. There is that perception that "everything is available on Google anyway." Library directors then bring this directive to the FDLP librarian and tensions heighten. Even though we know that the "Google" comment is false, if it is the perception of those that hold the funds, then that perception holds dominance.

In truth, the Internet has provided a powerful tool for those that do not live near a FDLP library. Librarians in smaller libraries in rural areas have become government information librarians by default because now they can show their patrons in their own communities how to find a world of information not possible in the past. However, remember that everything is not online and that the Internet does not offer the permanency of print. Many users prefer reading complicated government information in print, such as current codified laws and regulations, and are disappointed when not available. Reading a new law online containing many pages of legal language can be cumbersome. Without the print, many of our government documents, in practice, are not very accessible.

Accessibility and transparency of a nation's information and legal documents are vital for open and efficient governance, especially during economic crises. Openness is necessary for economic development, because openness challenges corruption and favoritism and is effective in limiting government abuse. Not only is transparency important for the governance of a democracy, international transparency is a recognized legal concept utilized in World Trade Organization agreements (Zollner, 2006).

Seeking to Perfect: from Tweaking to Gutting and Everything in Between

The FDLP program has evolved over its lifetime as we have seen in the brief history provided earlier. For the most part, however, substantive change has been minimal. To recap, the most recent change in terms of how the program is managed came about 50 years ago with the Depository Library Act of 1962; and a change in terms of scope came about almost twenty years ago with the Government Printing Office Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act of 1993—the legislation that formally acknowledged the ongoing and inevitable movement from a print-based environment to an electronic environment (note that these laws are codified in the United States Code, Title 44, chapters 19 and 41 respectively).

With the passage of the 1993 legislation, and continuing until today, the FDL community has often found itself at odds with itself, seeking answers to questions that could not have been anticipated when the program was first begun and government publications were birthed from printing presses as physical items looking for welcoming homes. Now that government publications are more frequently birthed from bits and bytes of electronic energy, these offspring seem to be content simply hovering in that cloud we keep hearing so much about—homelessness seems to suit them.

It is this very “homelessness” that provides the subject matter for those sometimes contentious discussions about how patrons should have access to government information now that so much of that information is available online. Before describing and offering examples of the various levels of

these discussions, or dialogs, I want to clarify once again the major philosophical concerns that inform the dialogs: first, the political philosophy of transparency of government in a democracy; second, the related philosophy of equality of access to government information for citizens in a democracy; and third, economic realities and the introduction of “the market” as a factor in determining if/how the first two concerns are successfully managed. Keeping all of these often disharmonious ideals in balance has become the provocation for all levels of discussion, from the ubiquitous survey/questionnaire asking how the program can be improved (to suit the needs of multiple constituents) to the outright diatribe railing against the existence of such a program in the 21st century.

A Kinder-Gentler Approach: Tell Us What You Think We Should Do (for You?)

At the end of July 2012, the final portion of a study designed to collect information that would help GPO/FDLP identify problem areas and potentially modify the program to fix those areas was due. At the annual Depository Library Conference held in October 2011, the Superintendent of Documents, Mary Alice Baish, and her staff announced that they would be creating a survey to be filled out by every depository library in the program, after which a composite survey (a forecast) based on the responses to the individual surveys would be filled out by representatives of each state. This composite survey would then form the basis for a statewide plan—the intention of which would be to lay out how the state’s libraries could work with the FDLP under the constraints of the current legislation (tit. 44 USC) and to suggest ways to work with the FDLP if future legislation could allow for structural changes to potentially streamline the program.

Before this most current survey instrument was released, over the years, others had been brought before the FDL community specifically and before the library community at large. For the purpose of cogency and brevity, only two of the latest instruments will be discussed in any detail. The

most recent example was the Ithaka Modeling Report of 2010/11. The following is taken directly from the FDLP Desktop's archived announcements:

FDLP Consultant Contract Awarded

As part of its strategic planning process for the future of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) has awarded the FDLP consultant contract to ITHAKA. As part of the recommendations from the Depository Library Council (DLC) at the Spring 2009 DLC Meeting, the FDLP consultant will provide GPO with impartial library program consulting and modeling services.

Based in New York, NY, ITHAKA is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping the academic community take full advantage of rapidly advancing information and networking technologies. GPO will be working specifically with Ithaka S+R (ITHAKA's strategy and research division), which works to develop sustainable business models and conducts research and analysis on the impact of digital media on the academic community as a whole.

Working with stakeholders from across the FDLP community, Ithaka S+R will develop recommendations for sustainable model(s) for the FDLP that ensure that the American public has systematic and permanent access to Federal Government information collections and services in the 21st century and beyond.

Ithaka S+R will create a Web site that will provide details on the goals and strategy of this project, updates on progress, as well as a venue for community input and engagement. The final report, including recommendations, will be issued publicly during the first quarter of 2011. (FDLP Consultant Contract Awarded, 2010)

Even though the goals of this project were stated explicitly and much time and effort were put into gathering and analyzing information about the FDLP and other library networks, then creating suggested paths for changes to the program, the findings from the project did not meet with the approval of GPO when those findings were published in the final report: “After a very comprehensive analysis by GPO, the final report prepared by Ithaka was deemed unacceptable under the terms of the contract. The models proposed by Ithaka are not practical and sustainable to meet the mission, goals, and principles of the FDLP” (Baish, 2011). One might say that the lengthy and expensive study resulted in a public relations nightmare rather than in a dream of a new FDLP.

There is one more survey that deserves mention in the context of this paper—the spring 2008 survey of Deans and Directors of regional FDLs, found at:

http://www.fdlp.gov/home/repository/doc_view/55-regional-depository-library-survey-summary-of-results

Looking at the questions and the results of this survey seems to provide a very different picture of how Regional Depository Libraries viewed their roles and participation in the program only four years ago as compared with how they “seem” to be viewing those same roles now. For instance, out of the twenty-six questions asked, three could be identified as having to do with adequate space for federal depository publications. All of these twenty-six questions used a Likert scale with the following choices: Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; Strongly Agree. When asked if the library had sufficient space for five years of growth in government publications, in all cases, the greatest numbers of respondents answered with the “Agree” option—for print, microfiche, and tangible electronic (e.g., CD-ROM) formats. Four years later, in any conversation held with Regional Depository Deans or Directors, one is likely to hear the exact opposite response—that there is no room for Government Materials in any tangible format.

Another four of the questions involve perceptions of adequate staffing required to support a Regional Depository operation. Again, in 2008, the greatest numbers of respondents answered that they “Agreed” that they had sufficient staffing—adequate professional staff (54%), support staff (62.7%), and temporary staff (47.1%). In 2012, however, one hears from Regional Depository Deans and Directors that they do not have adequate staffing to properly function in a Regional capacity—or to even continue being a Regional.⁹

So, what has changed? The answer can be found in the responses to the questions concerning funding; for example, “Financial support to cover the costs of regional depository operations continues to increase”: 39.2% disagreed and 33.3% strongly disagreed; only 11.8% agreed. Similarly, “The funding outlook for my library looks promising over the next 3-5 years; a budget increase is expected”: 40.4% disagreed and 38.5% strongly disagreed; absolutely no one (0.0%) agreed. What these responses at that time tell us is that there was awareness that funding cuts could impact services (space and staffing specifically) but that those cuts had not yet taken their real toll. Four years later, reality has set in; and libraries—especially state-funded libraries—are painfully aware of how limited their options will be.

The Times They Are a Changin’: Can We Think Outside of the Depository Shipment Box?

We like to think that reasonable people suggest reasonable solutions to problems, and we like to think that those reasonable solutions will eventually solve most of the problems for which they were created. However, one can take a look at all of the reasonable solutions (some in response to the surveys, others in response to more indirectly expressed concerns) that have been posed over the years and see that, in spite of the best of intentions on the parts of all of the players, very little has actually changed for the better; in fact, as technology continues to rapidly change and budgets continue to

⁹ : There is reason to believe that had this same 2008 survey been filled out by members of those very staffs (and not just by administrators), the responses would have been different back then—those actually working day to day with Regional Collections have always been aware that there was not enough staffing to cover the duties efficiently.

shrink, we seem to be perpetually behind the curve of change rather than ahead of it. This awareness is what causes some onlookers, and even members of the depository community, to call for radical changes—changes that, in the opinions of those who believe the program is still at its core viable and, thus, salvageable, are unnecessarily extreme and potentially harmful to the sacred concept of free and equal access to government information. Before reacting to those more radical proposals, let's take a look at two of the more conservative approaches that came from more rational discussions held and thoughtful papers written.

Problems of Regional Depository Libraries; 1966 Panel Discussion, Syracuse University, New York

Looking at the sub-title directly above, one might wonder if there weren't a typo where the date "1966" appears. It was only four years after the passage of the Depository Library Act of 1962, the legislation creating the still current system of Regional and Selective Depository Libraries, and already participants in this newly created program were dissatisfied enough to warrant a panel discussion at the Syracuse University School of Library Science. This discussion was no small affair, either; its participants included Carper Buckley, then United States Superintendent of Documents; Peter Paulson, Head of Technical Services, New York State Library and Chairman of the State Library Committee on Federal Depository Library Service; Sylvia Faibisoff, Head of the Central Serials Record, Cornell University Libraries; and Warren Boes, Director of Libraries at Syracuse University (*Problems of Regional Depository Libraries, 1967*).

During this panel discussion, the thorny issue of financing came up. The transcripts of sections of this general discussion indicate that the lament about inadequate funding for depository libraries, especially the newly created Regionals, was already being heard:

Mr. Paulson: I would like to say something first about money. For a long time, the mis-impression has been abroad that publications are free to depository libraries. A

1956 survey showed that depository libraries were spending about a million and a half dollars a year in servicing, housing, cataloging, and binding the publications they were receiving as depositories. You might compare that to the federal government's contribution to the program, which in the same year was five hundred thousand dollars. Now certainly this indicates that there are a lot of expenses connected with depository service that libraries incur, which we do not ordinarily consider.

The role of regional depository seems to be all obligation and very little, if any, compensation. There is really no privilege that a library gains by becoming a regional depository. It incurs the obligation to give interloan service, and to accept all publications. . . .

Mr. Boes: Government documents are information of importance, telling what is happening in our government offices. It seems to me that it's a natural outgrowth that eventually there should be subsidization of the various government depository centers, to satisfy the regional centers (at least to begin with) in their responsibilities to those who must be informed. (Problems, 1967)

Other concerns brought up at this discussion include many of the other issues we are still facing today—one in particular is the concern over the loss of tangible materials that were not properly archived and are, thus, lost for good. A suggestion for a "super-regional" that would keep at least one copy of everything stored in perpetuity came up in the following exchange among Mr. Paulson, Mr. Buckley, and Mrs. Faibisoff:

Mr. Paulson: . . . [prior to the 1962 depository act] there have been libraries that have discarded material.

Mr. Buckley: . . . libraries' representatives came before the committee [hearings on the 1962 depository act] and pointed out that there was no way that they could get rid of this material [documents sent through the depository program], and that the superintendent of documents would not let them discard to the extent that they wanted to. . . . it was 1949 when I assumed the position of Assistant Superintendent of Documents . . . [c]onstant letters came to us appealing that there was no space and the only solution to this problem was that we should issues more or less blanket instructions to permit the library to dispose of almost anything. . . .

Mrs. Faibisoff: My feeling . . . is that we need someplace in the country, a warehouse, for back files of this depository material . . . another archival center upon which we could draw . . . someplace where we can store it and get it.

Mr. Paulson: What you are suggesting is really a super-regional library.

Mrs. Faibisoff: Exactly. Or the elimination of the state regional. (Problems, 1967)

GODORT Weighs in—an Occasional Paper

In August of 2009, GODORT, the American Library Association's Government Documents Roundtable, published "'This Page Intentionally Blank:' Writing the Next Chapter in the Future of the Federal Depository Library Program" in its series of Occasional Papers. This offering by Bill Sleeman¹⁰ is one of the many polemical observations written on the FDLP in the past few years; but this one offers a measured and positive point of view rather than a rabid and negative one.

¹⁰ At the time of this publication's release, Sleeman was a librarian at University of Maryland's Thurgood Marshall Law Library. He is currently Assistant Librarian for Technical Services and Special Collections at the Supreme Court of the United States.

Sleeman accomplishes this measured approach by following the history of the FDLP section with a section that describes “Current Challenges,” following that section with a wrap-up section that offers “Key Considerations in Planning for the Future.” The most notable aspect of the current challenges described by Sleeman is the optimism with which he details them. In fact, before he lists them, he states, “These challenges are also an opportunity for the FDLP to grow and reach our audiences in new ways—in that way the challenges we face are a positive not a negative” (Sleeman, 2009). While Sleeman’s list of challenges is not numbered, its order is implied by bullet points, of which there are seven. The most cogent to this discussion are the following: Electronic Government (e-Government) initiatives; proliferation of electronic sources and the reliability of access to them; continued demand for print (two concerns are involved here; one, the preference of some patrons for use of paper, and two, the fact that, in truth, not everything is online); and—in direct opposition to anything positive—the lack of funding being given to GPO to make its programs and initiatives come to any fruition (Sleeman 2009, pp. 7-10).

In the “Key Considerations” section, the author tells us that he will list “six key areas that must be a part of any project to move the FDLP forward into the 21st Century” (Sleeman, 2009). After primarily endorsing program changes in the first five of these areas (program changes reflective of all other groups’ suggestions for program change, such as heightened concern about housing and preservation of tangible collections, continued concern about e-government and other aspects of the move to a digital based service model), Sleeman saves the last area for his version of the FDLP *cri de coeur*—“We must continue not only to support but also to defend the concept of free, permanent and un-encumbered (this is NO embedded rights management software or controls) public access to taxpayer paid for research and government information” (Sleeman, 2009).

We Still Honor Freedom of Speech: Naysayers Allowed Time at the Podium

As promised, the final comments on the topic of the changing landscape of government information in the US will be those of the more radical nature. The authors of the two pieces to be discussed acknowledge many of the same problems with the program as do the earlier quoted authors, but these two authors see the problems as either insurmountable or as so rooted in the program that the entire program must be scrapped.

In 2009, Peter Hernon and Laura Saunders wrote an article for *College & Research Libraries*, a publication of the American Library Association's sub-group the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). The informal study that provided material for the article was a query of thirty directors of university libraries in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) which are also federal depository libraries. The query itself asked these directors how they envisioned their relationship with the FDLP in coming years. The information gathered from this article that is most disheartening is not necessarily the possible scenarios suggested nor even the full interviews of directors as recorded in the article. Most disturbing are the blurbs of commentary—both from the directors themselves and from the authors in their editorial roles—that paint a depressing picture of how the program is viewed by those who question its efficiency.

An example of this commentary relates to the directors' "negative opinion of the GPO, JCP [Joint Committee on Printing], and Documents Librarians . . . "

[Some] characterize the GPO and the JCP as impediments to progress rather than as potential partners. . . .The impression is that the GPO does not provide leadership and no longer seeks to get to know member libraries and their strategic priorities. Indeed, one director went so far as to envision removing the GPO "from the equation" altogether. (Hernon & Saunders, 2009)

This same attitude about the GPO is even more firmly stated by Charles A. Seavey in his opinion piece in the October 2010 issue of *American Libraries: The Magazine of the American Library Association*. In case one might doubt what Seavey is suggesting in his piece, he titles it “GPO Must Go: The Government Printing Office is an obsolete relic.” To be fair, he considers the Superintendent of Documents (SuDoc) to be the “key agency” in GPO; so he states that “SuDoc badly needs a new home, a new name, and to be free of GPO” (Seavey, 2010). However, he seems to contradict that sentiment when he says, “The FDLP has served the country well, but it is now outmoded and severely limits access to government information” (Seavey, 2010).

The contradiction here comes from his disconnection of the FDLP with the SuDoc. It is precisely the job of the SuDoc to head the FDLP—and both of them are under the auspices of GPO. Seavey also makes a strange statement with the accusation that the FDLP is limiting access to government information. There may be other players in the federal scheme of information dissemination who are, in fact, guilty of this limiting; but the FDLP certainly is not.

Along these lines of moving the FDLP to a “new home,” a July 2011 report from the House of Representatives officially directs the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to “review the feasibility of Executive Branch printing being performed by the General Services Administration, the transfer of the Superintendent of Documents program to the Library of Congress, and the privatization of the GPO” (United States. Congress. House, 2011). This proposal to move the Superintendent of Documents position and the programs it oversees to control by the Library of Congress is not new. At least two other almost identical proposals have been parts of previous House Reports—House Report 103-403, Providing for consideration of H.R. 3400, November 1993; and House Report 106-796, to accompany Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill, FY 2001. As one prominent member of the FDL Community says,

. . . we have been down this road before. As always, from the library community's perspective, the bottom line in assessing any of these proposals has been the extent to which it improves "no-fee public access to government information in all forms and from all three branches of government now and in the future." Unfortunately, that's not always been Congress's criterion in measuring the value of these things.

(O'Mahony, 2012)

While We Look for Answers, We Must Not Lose Sight of the Mission

To finalize and summarize, the state of United States federal government information dissemination is, at the very least, in flux. Expensive technology has become the vehicle for the dissemination, and necessary monies for that technology are not always available—not to the agencies that create the information nor to the local libraries that directly provide the information to the public. While we quibble and argue over how best to function in a new technological era that coincides ironically with an economic downturn, we are losing resources that need to be in place to fulfill the mission of a transparent government and an informed citizenry in a democracy. To quote a perceptive colleague, it is depressing that a country with a long history of freedom of information and an economy that comparatively speaking is still stronger than most others is nonetheless experiencing problems with keeping information free and accessible to all.

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